# THE DEACONSHIP

## ITS NATURE, QUALIFICATIONS RELATIONS AND DUTIES

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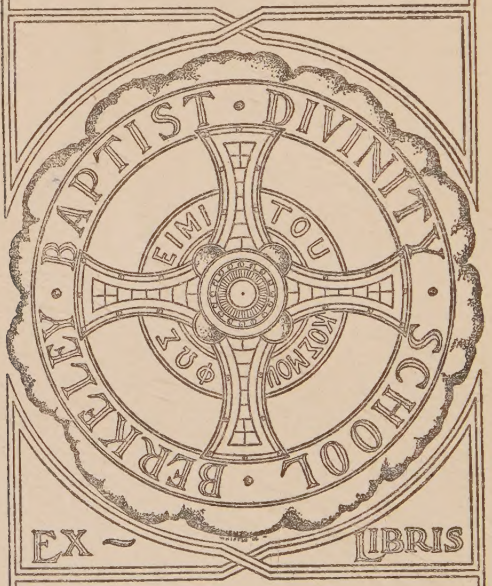


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# THE DEACONSHIP

## Its Nature, Qualifications, Relations, and Duties

By R. B. C. HOWELL

Author of
*The Terms of Communion at the Lord's Table*

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"They that have used the office of a Deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13).

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# INTRODUCTION

THE OFFICE of deacon has been neglected in recent years. At annual election time, three or six or a dozen names are presented to the congregation; and without too much consideration, and with comparatively little knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of a deacon, the members vote the slate in. The only time many people are reminded that there are deacons is on Communion Sunday, when they put in a brief appearance.

Dr. Howell was concerned with the possibility for a vital ministry inherent in the Deaconship of Christian churches, and out of his long experience with many boards of deacons, wrote this book. It was first published just one hundred years ago, and it has been circulated widely throughout the nation. A number of churches have presented the book to newly elected deacons as "required reading" for the office. Some readers have been interested in the Scriptural evidence of the office that the author cites. Others are especially grateful for the extensive treatment of the subject.

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At any rate, the volume has been dressed up for the occasion—its hundredth anniversary. The text is the same, but we believe the readability has been improved greatly. Orders keep coming in. Pastors and deacons still write letters of appreciation. *The Deaconship* continues to witness to the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ, and to the countless deacons who do his will.

THE EDITORS

Philadelphia, February, 1946

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# 1

## Nature of the Deaconship

A DEACON, *διάκονος*, is a Minister, or SERVANT. The term, in its broadest sense, describes ministers, or servants, of all classes, whether their department be temporal or spiritual. It has in its sense, a similar indefiniteness with the word *ἐκκλησία*, Church. In illustration of the truth of this remark, I will refer to several passages of the word of God. "Wilt thou not," says the author of the epistle to the Romans,[1] speaking of civil rulers, "be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is [ *θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός*, the *Deacon* of God—in our version] the *minister* of God to thee for good." In this, and other texts, the civil magistrate is announced as *"the Deacon of God."* The apostles are frequently called Deacons. In the address of Peter to the assembled disciples, a few days after the ascension of Christ,[2] he said, "Brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took

[1] Rom. 13 : 3-4
[2] Acts 1 : 16-17

Jesus. For he was numbered with us [the apostles], and had obtained part of [*τῆς διακονίας*, this *Deaconship*] this *ministry*." And again, in the apostolic prayer at the choosing of Matthias, we have this sentence, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of [*τῆς διακονιας*, this *Deaconship*] this *ministry*, and *apostleship*."[3] Paul, speaking of himself, and Apollos, says, they were *Διάκονοι*, *Deacons*, in our version, *ministers*, by whom the Corinthians believed the gospel.[4] Tychicus, an evangelist, is denominated a Deacon. Writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul says: "That ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and [*πιστὸς διάκονος*, faithful *Deacon*] faithful *minister* in the Lord, shall make known unto you all things; whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose."[5] The angels of God are declared to be *all Deacons*. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to *minister* [*διακονιαν*] for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"[6] I will only add that our Lord Jesus Christ himself is also a Deacon. "Now I [Paul] say, that Jesus Christ

[3] Acts 1 : 24-25
[4] 1 Cor. 3 : 5
[5] Eph. 6 : 21-22
[6] Heb. 1 : 14

was a [*Διάκονος, Deacon*] *minister* of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises."[7] Thus we see that according to the *usus loquendi* of the Scriptures, all ministers or servants, ordinary and extraordinary, political, ecclesiastical, angelic, and divine, are familiarly called *Deacons.*

There is, however, a strict application of the term to a specified class of officers in the church, who, in distinction from all others, bear this name. They are denominated Deacons, because they are the only class not already known by some other appellation, and not that the sense of their title is less applicable to others than to them. This fact is plainly set forth in the teachings of those portions of the word of God in which their station is described, and their duties are enjoined.

Let us consider this proposition. The inspired writers speak, frequently, of the office of pastors and the office of Deacons, as two distinct offices. In one of the epistles the qualifications of the former are described; and after that, and separately, those of the latter. Sometimes, also, the churches are addressed, with "their bishops, *and* Deacons." The position of the Deacons, therefore, is, plainly, in the same church with the pastor, or bishop,

[7] Rom. 15 : 8

and their duties, though in the most perfect harmony with each other, belong to different departments in the kingdom of Christ. They are coadjutors in the great work of salvation; fellow laborers in the truth. To the Deacons, no less than to the pastors, or ministers, most important interests are committed, upon their prompt, enlightened, and faithful attention to which, depends the prosperity of religion.

In the facts and considerations thus far submitted, all Christians, I believe, substantially concur. But, unhappily, much confusion and division of sentiment prevail regarding the nature of the office; the relations which the Deacons sustain to the church and to the ministry; and the duties they are properly called upon to perform. Nearly all the churches have made them ministers of the gospel. In the Roman Catholic church he is an inferior ecclesiastic, the second in the sacred order, who, with the permission of the bishop, has authority to preach and baptize. In the English church the Deacons are clergymen, but of the lowest grade; who can, however, perform all the offices of priests, except the consecration of the sacred elements and the pronouncing of the absolution. In the German Protestant churches, when more ministers than one in the same congregation are necessary, the second,

or assistant minister, is called the Deacon; and if there are two assistants, the first is called the Arch-Deacon. In the Presbyterian church, the office is commonly merged in that of ruling elder, and, therefore, mostly disused. Where it is still retained, it embraces, as among Congregationalists and others, merely the distribution of alms. The Methodist and Episcopal churches in this country adopt, substantially, on this subject, the practise of the English church, of which they are descendants and modifications. In the Baptist churches, the Deacons are not ministers who preach, on the one hand, nor mere distributors of alms on the other, but serve in a different capacity. They are a board of directors, and have charge of all the secular affairs in the kingdom of Christ.

This diversity is as painful as it is extensive and firmly fixed. I entertain no hope that, by anything that may be here said, I shall be able, in the smallest degree, to bring the advocates of these jarring opinions into harmony with each other. I do not, desirable as it may be, even aspire to such an object. My purpose is simply to ascertain, and embody, the teachings of the word of God on the whole subject, that we may know, and do, the will of the Most High.

The nature of the Deaconship finds its chief,

and most prominent illustration in the history of the origin of the office. By the acts there set forth, as well as by all that appears in every other part of the word of God, it will be fully seen that, as the pastor has supervision of *all the spiritualities* of the church, and is, therefore, overseer, or bishop in that department; so the deacons are overseers of *all her temporalities*, of which they of right have the full control. This was, certainly, the form of organization in "the model church at Jerusalem."

The first professors of the religion of Christ were well informed of the fact, often announced to them by their Master, that their city was soon to be destroyed, their country overrun, and the nation dispersed, so that their property would be of no further value to them. Besides this, they subjected themselves, by uniting with Christ, not only to persecution and excommunication from the congregation of the Jews, but also to the confiscation of all their earthly possessions. As a measure of economy, precaution, and defence, therefore, by which they could secure the means of life for their own support, "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need."[8] Thus, and

[8]Acts 2 : 44-45

for these reasons, a large common fund was created, the whole of which was placed in the hands of *"the twelve."* All the disciples, consequently, of every class, were made dependent on the apostles for their necessary sustenance. They were obliged, in addition to all their spiritual duties, to make, daily, an equitable disbursement to each individual—at least to every family—to supply the wants of the whole multitude! Some of the disciples, doubtless, probably many of them, had, originally, no property, and brought nothing with them into the common stock. Yet, such was the pervading feeling of benevolence, that all were made equal partakers in the benefits of the arrangement. This guardianship devolved upon the apostles, necessarily, a most laborious task. For a season, however, they persevered in its performance. But soon difficulties sprang up. Charges of inattention, and partiality, were preferred against the Hebrews, in which, probably, the apostles felt themselves included. "A murmuring" arose "of the Grecians [Hellenistic Jews] because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations."[9] Their cares and toils, before sufficiently arduous, now became insupportable. They instantly saw that they were in danger of sacrificing their influence over

[9] Acts 6:1

the public mind, by assuming to manage the temporal affairs of the Christians. They found also another impediment equally great. A large part of their time, all of which they were sacredly bound to devote to the preaching of the gospel, they were now consuming in mere earthly matters. They determined, therefore, without delay, to change the existing condition of things, and to provide for these newly developed necessities of the church. The measure devised, resulted, under the ever-present guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the institution of the Deaconship.

"Then," says Luke, "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said: It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables [*Διακονεῖν τραπέζαις, deacon tables*]. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves, continually, to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their

hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."[10]

Such is, briefly, the inspired history of the origin of the Deaconship. We learn from it the incontestable fact that the first deacons were not appointed as ministers of the gospel, nor with any intention of their ever becoming such. If some of them subsequently preached, they did so, not in their character as deacons, but by virtue of authority afterward conferred upon them as evangelists. To this topic we shall have occasion to recur, and will, therefore, not now pursue it. The deacons were, on the other hand, appointed not simply, as many maintain, to distribute the charities of the church; but expressly and alone, to relieve the apostles of *temporal cares*, by taking charge of this department of the church's affairs. Accordingly we see their duties defined, in the reasons assigned for creating the office, as the opposite of those which they reserved to themselves. If *we*, said they, continue to *"serve tables,"* we must *"leave"* preaching "the word of God." We cannot accomplish both. Let *the Deacons* serve the "tables" of the people. *They* can do *that*, fully as well as we can, probably

[10] Acts 6 : 2-7

better. "And *we* will give ourselves *continually* to prayer, and to the ministry of the word"—exclusively to the service of preaching the gospel. The deacons, therefore, were originally not preachers, nor merely conservators for the poor, but had the administration of the property of the church, which they conducted, as the divinely authorized agents, for the benefit of the whole community.

In these conclusions we are sustained, not only by the word of God, but, also, by the involuntary assent even of those who adopt a practise the opposite of that which we advocate. For example, Burkitt, a deservedly popular commentator of the English church, says: "The deacons were, at first, instituted for the service of the poor; the alms of the church were brought to the altar, the deacons received them, and distributed them among the aged, and impotent, from house to house."[11] Here he fully confesses that they were not ministers; but he falls into the opposite error. Doctor Dick, in his Theology, remarks, on this subject, "It is true, indeed, that, as the design of the institution was not to divert the attention of the apostles from the ministry of the word, the care of all temporal matters, in which the church is concerned, may be considered as be-

[11] On 1 Tim. 3:8

longing to deacons."[12] Why, then, it may be asked, have the Presbyterians generally, of which community Doctor Dick was a distinguished member, no deacons. He himself, under a misconception of the nature of the office, like that of Burkitt, explains:[13] Deacons "were specially appointed solely for the poor. In some congregations there are no poor; in others they are very few in number; and where they most abound, they can be attended to by the elders." In the *Encyclopedia Americana,* a deacon is described thus: "A person who belongs to the inferior order of ministers in the church. Seven were first instituted by the apostles, which number was retained a long time, in several churches. Their duty was to serve in the *agapæ* [love feasts] to distribute the bread and wine to the communicants, and to dispense alms. The office of the deacons, at first, merely concerned things temporal!"[14]

We might thus pass through the whole circle of the sects, showing that they all, in some way, concede our doctrines to be correct, as to the original designs and purposes of the Deaconship, and adducing their confessions that they have either abolished the office, or changed its character and duties. But these facts are

[12] Vol. II, pp. 498-499
[13] *Ut supra.*
[14] *S. V.*

so well known that I deem it unnecessary further to prosecute this particular topic.

Doubts, I proceed to remark, have been expressed whether the officers, the history of whose appointment we have briefly recapitulated, were the same with the deacons described in the epistles. Doctor Mosheim, and others of his class, maintain that they were not. He alleges,[15] that deacons existed before this time, and are spoken of by Christ[16] in the following passage: "But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Here the word *younger* is *νεώτερος*, and for *he that doth serve*, *διακονῶν*. The latter word he supposes to be unanswerably explanatory of the former, and to denote here, appropriately, the office of a deacon in the Christian church. *Μείζων*, also, the Greek word for *greatest*, he considers as denoting *a ruler*, or *presbyter;* because it is explained by *ἡγούμενος*, *chief*, and contrasted to *διακονῶν*. In conformity to this interpretation, he supposed that the *young men*, who carried Ananias and Sapphira to their burial, were deacons in the proper sense. In support, and, as he thinks, in absolute confirmation of this opinion, he observes, that Peter says: "And

[15] Dwight's *Theology*, Vol. IV, pp. 286-288
[16] Luke 22 : 26

likewise ye *younger*, submit yourselves to the *elder*." Here the words are *νεώτεροι*, and *πρεσβύτεροι*, the latter meaning, as he apprehends, the *elders* of the church, and the former the *deacons*. To all this he adds, that this sense of the word *νεώτεροι*, might be confirmed by numberless citations from Greek and Roman writers, and a variety of authors, sacred and profane. From these considerations, Doctor Mosheim concludes, that *there were deacons in the church anterior to those whose appointment we have considered*, and that *the seven* were instituted only, or chiefly, to remedy the disorders of the moment.

There are others who reject the exegesis of Mosheim, but who arrive, by a different route, at similar conclusions. They hold that the office, first filled by the seven, was originated by temporary disorders, and passed away with the community of goods among the disciples. Afterward the appointment of deacons was, they imagine, discretionary, and might be wholly discontinued without injury. Doctor Dick expresses their opinion when he says: "In some parts of the church the office of deacon is retained, but in others it is not; and the want of it has been represented as a criminal omission. But the institution arose out of particular circumstances, and may, therefore, be

dispensed with where these do not exist. The poor," he adds, "where they are found, can be attended to by the elders, who, on the principle that an inferior office is comprehended in a superior, possess the power of deacons, as ministers possess the power of elders. This," concludes Doctor Dick, "is our apology for not having deacons in our congregations, and it seems to be satisfactory."[17]

To this reasoning of the Scotch divine, and those who adhere to him, we reply, summarily, that it is based upon three palpable errors. First, that the deacon's office originated in peculiar and temporary circumstances; secondly, that, where these circumstances are supposed not to exist, the church may abolish it; and thirdly, that its duties may be performed by higher officers, whose offices necessarily include the lower! These errors are too obvious to need refutation.

But the expositions of Doctor Mosheim, by which he proposes to establish the existence of deacons in the church before the ascension of Christ, deserve a more particular examination. They are very ingenious, but they labor under one capital defect—they are entirely inapplicable; his Scripture passages have not the remotest reference to the Deaconship. Every one

[17] *Theology*, Vol. II, p. 499

—Doctor Mosheim's careful scholarship notwithstanding — must see, on turning to his texts, that their whole design was, not to teach anything with regard to the Deaconship, but to inculcate upon the disciples those lessons of humility, so necessary both for them and for us. When Christ and his apostles tell us, that in the church of the Redeemer, "the greatest is bound to feel and act as a youth, or child, ought to feel and act; and that he who is chief ought to behave with the modesty and humility of him whose business it is to serve," we are charmed with the beautiful lesson inculcated; and cannot but be surprised that any one, by a sublimated process of criticism, should think of turning it aside from its purpose, and especially of finding in it a class of ecclesiastical officers nowhere recorded, at the time, as having an existence! Is it not incredible, that Christ should, in the days of his flesh, have formed an order of officers in his church, by his own immediate appointment, and yet that no writer of the New Testament, except in distant and incomprehensible allusions, should have furnished us any account of a procedure so important? Besides, in the act of choosing the deacons, the history of which we have considered, there is not the least allusion to any preexisting officers of that title or character.

On the contrary, the idea is forbidden by the spirit of the whole transaction.

It is perfectly certain, therefore, that up to the time we have indicated, there were no deacons in the church. It is equally clear, that those then appointed were not designed to serve a mere temporary purpose, but were to be continued in the church, and are as necessary now as they were when first instituted.

Was the Deaconship originated to remedy the disorders growing out of the community of goods merely, and to pass away with that condition of things? I cannot see how any one can seriously entertain this opinion, since long after the disciples had ceased to have "all things common," and there were no longer any disorders on this account, the office was still existing in all the churches. In the epistles it is familiarly spoken of, and especially in the first epistle to Timothy, written at least thirty years after the disciples had exhausted their common property, and the community of goods was no more. To the close of the Apostolic age it was inculcated and required. The qualifications necessary to be possessed by those who are elevated to the office, are minutely described, and the ministry admonished to be extremely cautious as to the character of the men upon whom they conferred this dignity.

The moral, religious, and intellectual endowments of the officer; the duties of his station; his responsibilities; and the importance of his fidelity; as enumerated and enforced by Paul, are essentially the same with those stated at the origination of the office, and prove, beyond question, that it was the same officer.

Let us advert to *three* additional facts, in proof that the perpetuation of the Deaconship in the church is positively indispensable.

Every church, in the first place, must, in the nature of things, own more or less common property and funds, for the management of which the services of deacons are essential. She must possess a place of worship; and she must create and sustain a treasury, because it is necessary that she support her pastor, that she succor and relieve her poor, that she meet her incidental expenses, and that she aid in the general dissemination of the gospel. Who, in all this, is to superintend and direct affairs to the proper issue? God has appointed for this special purpose the deacons; therefore their office must be perpetually continued in the church.

The temporal affairs of the church, secondly, cannot, as experience fully teaches, *now* be administered by the pastors, without subjecting them to the same difficulties that beset the

apostles. Either they will be fatally neglected by them, and great injury ensue; or a very large part of their time will be thereby engrossed, which is not admissible, since the whole is appropriated, by the King in Zion, to the preaching of the word. The deacons must therefore be retained.

And, lastly, the law enacting the Deaconship has never been repealed, changed, or modified in any way. It is still in full force, and if disregarded by us, we become, on that account, criminal before God. Indeed, no church, without deacons to preside over its temporal affairs, is legally or fully organized, or can properly claim to be in every respect, Christ's church.

The perpetuation of the Deaconship, therefore, in its original form, and with its primitive duties is as obligatory as any other portion of the word of God.

When we look around us we see, almost everywhere, other and unauthorized officers introduced into the church to do their work; the deacons, where they exist at all, diverted from it, and engaged in other duties than those they were originally appointed to perform. I cannot but lament this perversion, so generally prevalent, since it must inevitably result in deep and lasting injury to the cause it is designed to subserve. What God appoints is

always best for his people. To devise a plan of our own, and to substitute it for his, is to commit the folly of assuming to be more wise and to understand better the wants of his church than Christ himself! Remove the deacons, either by transferring them to the ministry or in any other way, and the pecuniary interests of religion, always extensive and important, must revert to the clergy, be wholly neglected, or be under the control of men who have no authority in the premises. In either case the word of God is contemned, and the rights of both the church and the ministry are abused and injured. We are disobedient, presumptuous, and the blessing of God is justly forfeited. The evil is inevitable and aggravated.

Thus have we seen the nature of the Deaconship illustrated in a definition as to what the office really is; the variety of opinions entertained in relation to it; and our own doctrine and practise on the subject; also in the history of its origin, the necessity of its perpetuation in the church, and the injury which must always result when it is diverted from its original design. Let us, beloved brethren, understand ourselves upon this subject; adhere unwaveringly to the word of God; maintain the Deaconship in its original form and with

its primitive purposes; and we may confidently anticipate upon "our works of faith, and labors of love," the rich blessing of our heavenly Father.

# 2

## Qualifications for the Deaconship

THE success of an officer must always depend, mainly, upon his qualifications to perform the duties of his office. Incompetent or unfaithful men, either in the Deaconship or the ministry, invariably prove an incubus upon the cause their appointment was intended to promote. The apostles, guided by these considerations, describe with careful particularity the endowments necessary to be possessed to fit a man for this distinguished station. To the church in Jerusalem they said that they must be "Men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom."[1] And Paul charged Timothy thus: "The deacons must be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase

[1] Acts 6:3

to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but, if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God."[2]

Thus briefly are set forth in the Scriptures, the qualifications for the Deaconship. The subject presents six distinct points, which we will proceed to consider separately.

Whether the qualifications of a brother render him eligible to the Deaconship, is, in the first place, determined by the character of his conjugal relations.

On this part of our subject we are thus admonished: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife." Upon the first sentence in this text—"Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things"—opinions are at variance. But our best and most judicious Biblical critics have decided that it does not refer to the deacons' *wives*, but to another class of women mistaken for them by our translators. It is evident, however, that every man must be, more or less, influenced for good or for evil by his wife. If she does not maintain

[2] 1 Tim. 3: 8-15

a reputable character, prudence at least would dictate, that the husband should not be placed in a position which will bring her so in contact with the church as to injure the cause of religion. It is exceedingly desirable that the wives of deacons, and the wives of all other Christian men, should fully correspond with the apostolic description. This all, for very many reasons, will frankly confess. Next to the religion of Christ, a pious, intelligent, exemplary, zealous, devoted, affectionate wife, is the most precious gift of God. Happy is that man who is blessed with such a companion through life's weary pilgrimage. But why if the passage does not describe the wives of deacons, should our translators have so represented it? I know not. The church to which they all belonged had dispensed with the Deaconship in its original form, and had made the officer a clergyman. Supposing, as we may conjecture, that a minister's wife ought to be such a woman as Paul describes, and as it is not required of the bishops, and since with them bishops are made of deacons, they determined that it must be required of deacons! This might probably have been the motive for our present version.

We have four reasons for believing that the passage does not refer to *the wives of the deacons*. With these we will content ourselves at

present, and will resume the subject in a subsequent chapter.

In the first place, the inspired original will not sustain the interpretation. The literal rendering is simply, *"Let the women likewise be grave,"* etc. What *women?* The conclusion is as natural that the apostle meant some other women than the wives of the deacons.

Secondly, the wives of the deacons are expressly spoken of in the next verse, and therefore, probably not in this.

Thirdly, it is not rational to conclude that more, on the score of religion and fidelity, would be demanded as to the wives of deacons than as to those of bishops, and no such requirements are challenged of the wives of bishops.

Lastly, it is the opinion of expositors generally in which I feel myself obliged to concur, that the apostle delineates those female *assistants* to deacons, usually called *Deaconesses,* of whom we read in several other places in the New Testament, whom we know existed in the apostolic churches, and of whom we hear so much in the writings of the early Christian fathers. He was describing the qualifications of deacons, and continues his theme down to this verse; here he portrays "THE WOMEN;" and in the next place the deacons' wives. By

these *"women"* therefore, he must have meant the *Deaconesses,* who like the *Deacons,* must be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. But more of this hereafter. We dismiss the passage as having no direct reference to the wives of deacons.

If we do not materially err in these expositions, the only text which speaks of the conjugal relations of the deacons simply restricts them to *one wife,* without any especial direction as to what shall be her character—*"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife."*

Does this apostolic injunction make it necessary, to qualify a brother for the Deaconship, that he shall *actually have a wife?* A misapprehension of the nature of the instructions here given has led, in various quarters, to some singular errors. Supposing that a wife is necessary to a deacon, the Moravian Church, the Reformed Dutch Church, and some of our own churches, always require it. They indeed frequently go so far as to conclude, that it disqualifies him if he has lost his wife, or if he has been married a second time! All this, however, is inconsistent both with reason and the true meaning of Scripture. If the deacon must be a married man, so also must the bishop. The same authority that enjoins it in the one case, enjoins it, and in the same words also, in the other.

"A bishop [a pastor] then, must be blameless, *the husband of one wife.*"[3] Yet who among us supposes that a minister is, for want of a wife, disqualified to assume the pastorship? It not unfrequently happens that the same churches that refuse to admit a single man to the Deaconship, receive without scruple an unmarried pastor! Such inconsistencies prove a very great want of reflection, as well as inadequate conceptions of the word of God. The meaning of the passage is plain. It commands, not that the deacon *shall have* a wife, but that, if he be married, he shall not, at the same time, have two or more wives, but that he shall have but "*one wife.*"

But why this special admonition on such a subject, since no deacon in our age or country can possibly, according to law, have more than one wife at a time? No one would think of making a man a deacon who has *two wives!* This restriction, however, let it be remembered, did not always exist, and does not even now in Oriental countries, where polygamy is still permitted by their governments and practised by the people. Our Creator, in the beginning, purposed that every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. Unhappily, not many centuries were counted in

[3] 1 Tim. 3:2

the world's history before this wise and salutary provision began to be painfully perverted. Men married as many wives as they felt inclined, and the practise prevailed in all nations. Israel offered no exception to this general departure. Ultimately polygamy found its way everywhere, even among the most pious of the servants of God. David, for example, had many wives; Solomon had several hundred; and up to the days of the apostles, every man had as many as he was disposed to take. Among those who professed religion and joined the primitive churches, there were doubtless not a few who had more wives than one. It would have been strange if they had not had. I submit, with deference, whether it is likely, for many reasons which may readily be imagined, that every one who joined the Christians was required to separate from all but one of his wives. No such law was enacted at the time, and had it been, its enforcement in the then condition of things would, in many cases, have been attended with incalculable suffering.

However this may have been, it was the purpose of Christ to abolish polygamy, and to restore marriage to its original state. In accordance with this intention, the Scriptures peremptorily prohibit every unmarried person from taking *but one* wife, and if a man had

more than one, although he might have retained his position as a private member, it was a perpetual disqualification for both the ministry and the Deaconship—and, indeed, for any other sacred office. This is the meaning of the apostle when he says, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife." If any man could deliberately disregard the authority of Jesus Christ in the matter of marriage, this was testimony sufficient of his unfitness for the Deaconship. The spirit of the injunction, as it applies to us, is, that he who is not pure in his conjugal relations, is not to be placed in authority in the church. He must partake, more or less, of the temper and moral feelings of his family. The possibility of his being "spiritually minded" is precluded. How can he cultivate such a knowledge of the word of God as is essential to "soundness in the faith"? He cannot be a deacon.

The qualifications of a brother for the Deaconship are, in the second place, to be determined by his general reputation.

The deacons, said *"the twelve"* to the church in Jerusalem, at the institution of the office, must be *"men of honest report."* This, however, is a somewhat vague definition. More definiteness is necessary. To what particular points does it refer? In another place we have

the requisite information. Paul charges Timothy thus: "The deacons must be grave [of sedate and dignified carriage and deportment], not double tongued [speaking, one thing to one person and another to another, on the same subject—one thing in your presence and another in your absence], not given to much wine [so using intoxicating drinks as in any way to endanger their habits of the most perfect temperance], not greedy of filthy lucre ["*μὴ αἰσχροκερδεῖς*,—not *desirous of base gain*"—not employing base and unjustifiable means to enlarge their revenues], holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience [so acting and believing, as to have habitually a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men]. Let these also first be proved; [have given, as private members of the church, sufficient evidence of character, capacity, and readiness to act]; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." They must be endowed with all the moral qualities here enumerated as entering into the character of a man "of honest report," and they must, in addition, have the *reputation* of possessing them, not with the church only, but also with the world—"Having a good report of them that are without." This, at the first glance, will probably appear to be a hard condition. But it will not be so considered

when we come to remember that every man really is, as a general rule, what he has the reputation of being, especially among those who are most familiar with him in the details of life.

To the success of a minister, an irreproachable moral character everywhere is absolutely essential. Without it, there must necessarily be such a general want of confidence in his integrity and sincerity as will close the hearts of all who hear him. He has not "a good report of those who are without." Therefore, by his preaching, he rather dishonors Christ than advances the cause of religion. The multitudes will think him a hypocrite and to all his instructions and exhortations they will reply with the old proverb, "Physician heal thyself." He must be known as a man of exemplary piety. "A statue upon the housetop must be larger than life, or it will appear to be much smaller." So those who are ever subjected to the public gaze, elevated in conspicuous stations in the church, must be more religious than other men, or they will appear much less so. These considerations apply with equal force to the deacons. They too must be "men of honest report." If he is light, vain, and frivolous in his intercourse—*not grave;* if, on the same subject, he give different representations, not

confining himself to strict truth—*is double tongued;* if he drink intoxicating spirits, so as, even remotely, to bring his temperance into question—is *given to much wine;* if he avail himself of any low or undue means to increase his wealth—is *greedy of filthy lucre;* he is effectually disqualified for the Deaconship. Such a man can never acquire or maintain that influence over the public mind which the office demands; he cannot inculcate, successfully, a pure morality; nor can he offer, in his life, such an example as will do honor to the cause of Christ. All these considerations require that the deacons should be, and should have the reputation of being, men of unsullied honor.

Other and paramount reasons exist why the deacons should support an unimpeached, and unimpeachable, moral character—should be, indeed, "above suspicion."

They are the depositaries of all the common property and funds of the church; to supply the necessities of the destitute and suffering, they frequently receive contributions, disburse them at discretion, and no account is given, or expected to be rendered by them; and no remedy exists at law by which they can, in these, or, indeed, in any case, be compelled to fidelity. The whole church and congregation must, therefore, have in their incorruptible integrity

the most undoubting confidence. If their characters, in any moral respect, are equivocal, this defect amounts to a disqualification. They must be *"men of honest report."*

The third qualification respects the religious character of the candidate for the Deaconship.

Men of distinguished piety are demanded. Than this, nothing less can surely be meant by the phrase, "Full of the Holy Ghost"; in other words, full of the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God. Those who are thus eminently endowed possess sincere and unfailing religion, enjoy the love of Christ dwelling richly in their hearts. Of these acquirements the deacons, if they do their duty, will have pressing necessity. What else but the influence of the holiest affections can so attach them to the cause as to induce them promptly, patiently, and from year to year, to prosecute unwaveringly the many, and often extremely disagreeable duties, which they are constanty called upon to discharge? What else is there that is likely to prevent them from indulging in those neglects, to which unwilling nature so strongly prompts, and which, when permitted, are always so fatal to all the interests of the religion of Christ? They can never be borne onward by motives of worldly honor, because no temporal distinctions await them. Neither can they be prompted to

duty by the influence of pecuniary reward. They receive none. Their work is a gratuity. Yet they must devote much of their time, make many personal sacrifices, bear a thousand perplexities, and toil on, under every discouragement that may beset them, unshrinking, and to the end! Can so much be expected from any but men of the most exemplary piety? For these, and other reasons, those who are appointed to the Deaconship should, if possible, be like Stephen, "Full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost."

They must, in the fourth place, be men of sound Scriptural principles.

This characteristic in the qualifications requisite to the Deaconship is enjoined with great emphasis—"Holding the mystery of the faith." They may be strict in their morals; spiritual in their feelings; kind, courteous, and sincere in their Christian intercourse; regular and punctual in the performance of all their duties; and their hearts deeply imbued with the love of Christ. But even all this is not enough, if it is not accompanied by orthodoxy in their Christian doctrine—they must "hold the mystery of the faith."

This requisition necessarily involves more than a very limited knowledge of the word of God. How salutary, how indispensable to us

all, is the prayerful and careful study of divine revelation? "Search the Scriptures," said the Redeemer, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Without this we can form no stable system of theology, and our conduct, which is always based upon our principles, must be vacillating and unsteady. In our day, indeed, many professors of religion appear, doubtless in consequence of a want of competent information, to have hardly any definite doctrinal principles. Periodical excitements are looked to for almost every purpose. They carry us forward upon their resistless tide. As a natural result, our religion has assumed a spasmodic character, and seems to consist mostly, if not altogether, in feeling. With that denomination which happens to be convenient, therefore, the great mass, when they profess religion, unite themselves. They make, generally, almost no inquiry, are rarely informed of what that church believes; they nevertheless *profess* to receive and to cherish their doctrines! Church-membership has, in consequence, assumed a painful instability; and the tendencies to all descriptions of fanaticism are everywhere apparent. Who but the leading members of our churches—the deacons especially—are to stay this overwhelming tide of evil? And can

they do it unless they are thoroughly fixed in the truth as it is in Jesus?

What the doctrines are that constitute the sum of "the mystery of the faith," it is, of course, not proper for me here to describe. The attempt would, necessarily, occupy by far too much space. I may barely remark, that they are such as the distinction of persons in the Godhead, the divine Sonship, the proper Divinity, and the distinct personality of Christ; the Deity, personality, and work of the Holy Spirit; the unity of God; the incarnation of Christ, and the union of the two natures in him; the vicariousness of his sacrifice; justification by faith alone, through the merits of Christ; the duty of obedience to all the ordinances and commandments; the resurrection of the body, and everlasting life. In these, and such like doctrines of the gospel, it is necessary, to qualify a man for the Deaconship, that he be thoroughly orthodox.

Yet other reasons also require it. The influence which the deacons exert in the churches is to be considered. Should they be unsound in the faith it will not be difficult for them to find adherents, and thus bring additional evils into the body. They may, therefore, if defective "in the faith," instead of becoming a blessing, prove a source of the greatest in-

juries—perhaps overwhelm and destroy the church itself.

The deacons will also be called frequently, especially in private—even more frequently it may be than the pastor—to defend the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. This they can never do if they are wanting in orthodoxy. On the contrary, every attempt of the kind would necessarily inflict a new and dangerous wound, because it would be a new advocacy of error, and an increased dissemination of false principles.

They will be called upon to instruct the erring and the weak, to confirm the strong, and to establish the wavering. They must, therefore, not be unsteady or eccentric in their tenets; disposed, for any reasons, to compromise truth; nor, on the other hand, dogmatical and overbearing in its defence, but gentle, firm, and decided.

On these and many other accounts, it will be seen that the deacons must be men who hold unwaveringly "the mystery of the faith."

The qualifications for the Deaconship consist, in the fifth place, in intellectual capacity.

He who is chosen to that office must be "full of wisdom." Such is the apostolic admonition to the church in Jerusalem, and "it was written for our learning."

The term *wisdom*, as it occurs in this passage, does not, I presume, refer exclusively, or even primarily, to what is popularly known as human learning, or cultivation in the arts, sciences, and literature. Learning, I will confess, is very desirable; and yet instances often occur in which it is possessed profoundly, but blended with very little practical good sense! That kind of wisdom is doubtless meant, which will give them ability to manage the interests involved in their office, so as, on the one hand, to avoid all unnecessary difficulties, and on the other, by selecting the most appropriate measures, to gain, in the surest possible manner, the ends proposed. Literary acquirements, to any considerable extent, are not essential to the Deaconship, consequently, because they do not impart the peculiar powers required. And besides this, deacons are not, as ministers are, professionally teachers of the people. Frequently too, persons are found whose scientific advantages have been very limited, but who, nevertheless, have acquired much wisdom—much of that discriminating perception of the character of men and things, which prepares them to act well the part assigned men in ecclesiastical as well as temporal affairs. Such is the *wisdom* demanded for the Deaconship.

The necessity for careful attention in this

respect will be the more apparent to all, if we consider that without the capacity here required the deacons will never comprehend the nature, obligations, and extent of their duties. Enlarged views, a just appreciation of the objects proposed, and clear perceptions of the measures to be adopted to secure them, are indispensable. Otherwise they will be, as but too many already are, of little or no value. The time for action; the manner of proceeding; and how far any particular enterprise should be prosecuted; demand wise counsels.

These are some of the considerations that make it necessary that the deacons be men "*full* of wisdom."

No one, in the sixth and last place, should be selected as a deacon, who does not, in the management of his own personal affairs, give promise of efficiency and fidelity in his sacred office.

Look around you. Examine into the private affairs of those you would place in authority. Mark the apostolic portrait, "Ruling their children and their own houses well." "Let them first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon." As of a minister, so of a deacon: "Not a *novice,* lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." When the apostle instructs us that they must

"first be proved," he does not intimate that they must, previously to their ordination, have exercised the office, and thus have evinced their qualifications; but simply, that none be elected until, as private members of the church and otherwise, they have given full proof of their character, religion, orthodoxy, wisdom, and ability, as well as their readiness to do the work of the Deaconship.

The admonition now under consideration is by no means singular. Others, beside the church, are accustomed to look to a man's family government, and to his general management of his own concerns, as criteria by which to determine his fitness for particular pursuits, his energy, and the probability of his success. If we desire a partner in business; or if we find it necessary to intrust our affairs to the guidance of another person; our thoughts involuntarily turn to such considerations. If he is defective here, we hesitate to proceed. The same principles hold good in religion. If a man comes short in his own matters, "how shall *he* take care of the church of Christ?" Has he not promptness, energy, firmness, discretion? Has he not influence enough with his children to govern them? Has he not the requisite command over his servants? Is his business left at loose ends to drag itself along? Is

he seldom ready to meet his engagements at the proper time? Then, in these respects, his character is the reverse of that which the word of God requires for a deacon. Whatever of influence he would exert with his brethren would tend to diffuse in the church his own defects, and thus deprive her of more than half of her strength.

Would you secure the services of an efficient deacon who will conduct the church's affairs successfully? Select that brother who, if in other respects he is of the proper character, has his family—his children and servants—under a regular, mild, and firm government; in whose household economy, benevolence, and regularity, bear rule; who conducts his own business with skill and success; and who attends promptly, honorably, and energetically, to all his duties as a man. He is "proved and found blameless—ruling his children and his own house well. Let him use the office of a deacon."

Such are the Scriptural qualifications for the Deaconship. Let us recapitulate. Those who are appointed to this office must be pure in their conjugal relations; they must be men of unblemished general reputation; men of devout piety; men of sound orthodoxy in principle; men who are wise as to the character

of men and things, and who conduct well their own household and business affairs. Will it be objected to me that brethren who fully answer to this description can be very seldom found, and that if all these qualifications are insisted upon, many churches can have no deacons at all? This supposition is, I think, mistaken; but even were it not, it would in no way change the case, as it is presented before us in the divine record. I have held up before you the *inspired standard,* by which your judgment is to be formed. Shall the law be lowered in its obligations, because we may imagine that few men, if measured by it, would not be found wanting? As well might we bring down the divine standard of Christian excellence, and think to adjust it to the prevailing character of Christian morals. Such a course is not admissible. Let the churches select as their deacons those brethren who, in their judgment, approach nearest the inspired rule; and let all —Deacons and people—seek earnestly to reach it—*press* ever "towards the mark for the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

# 3

## Forms of Election and Ordination

By whom are the deacons to be elected and appointed? This is our next inquiry. I answer, they are to be *elected* by that particular church in which they are to serve, and they are to be *appointed,* or ordained, by the pastor, aided by such other ministers as the church may invite for that purpose.

Every separate congregation of believers, organized, with its appropriate officers, united together for the worship of God, embracing the doctrines and keeping the ordinances of Christ, as they were originally delivered to the saints, is a true church of the Redeemer. As such, it possesses full and exclusive powers of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over its members; is independent of any external authority, and for all its acts is responsible alone to its great Head in heaven. Than this no truth in the word of God appears to me to be more firmly established. Every such congregation is a constituent part of the universal Church, of which Jesus Christ is the sole lawgiver, ruler, and judge. Where, in the divine record, is the example found of one church claiming a right of jurisdiction over another? Nor is it any-

where intimated that any such jurisdiction was claimed, or exercised, by any body of ministers, churches, or by the representatives of either, or of both. Sessions, presbyteries, synods, conferences, consistories, assemblies, and all similar bodies, legislative and judicial, were wholly unknown in the days of the apostles. Associations, conventions, and even councils, have no power to go further than to offer their advice. When convened for any other purpose than to promote Christian fellowship, and the prosecution, by uniting their energies, of plans for the further and more effectual preaching of the gospel, they are illegitimate, and should not receive our countenance. Let us, for proof of this postulate, refer briefly to the word of God. The inspired record plainly shows, that each church, guided by the divine law, conducted, in apostolic times, its own discipline, elected its own officers, and took all other necessary measures for its own prosperity and usefulness, and for the dissemination abroad of the gospel of Christ. But we descend to more particularity. Referring to an instance of excommunication, Paul says to the Corinthian church: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when *ye are gathered together*, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to *deliver such a one* [a man who

had committed incest] unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."[1] By whom was this excision to be made? By the whole church "gathered together," for which act they had, with pastoral advice, "the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." Similar discipline is involved in the allusions of several other passages. "I would," says an apostle to the Galatians, "that they were even cut off which trouble you;"[2] and he appeals to the church to carry his advice into effect. Expulsions from fellowship were, therefore, made by *the whole church.* So, also, were restorations. Speaking, in a second letter to the Corinthians, of the same person, Paul thus advises his readmission *by them* to fellowship: "Sufficient unto such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. *Ye ought* to forgive him, and comfort him, lest, perhaps, such a one should be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him."[3] Was he not restored by the church, *as a church?* I may remark, that in this act is implied the power of original admission, which seems to be also recognized in the admonition to the Roman church: "Him

[1] 1 Cor. 5: 4-5
[2] Gal. 5: 12
[3] 2 Cor. 2: 6-8

that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."[4] I further observe, that the church, as a body, transacted its own ordinary business. Take two instances in proof. "When I come," said Paul to one of them, "whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality."[5] And again, he says: "We have sent with him [Titus] the brother whose praise is in the gospel, throughout all the churches; and not that only, but who was *chosen of the churches* to travel with us."[6] We go further still. It is plain that the churches elected their own pastors by a full suffrage, expressed by [ *Χειροτονήσαντες* ][7] stretching forth the hand. This is particularly mentioned of the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and others, planted by Paul and Barnabas. What was true of their polity was certainly true of the polity of all. But the principles we have now set forth are confirmed, illustrated, and established, by the manner of electing the deacons pursued by the church in Jerusalem.[8] The act was performed, not by the ministry, or by a conference, or a session, but by "*the multitude of the disciples*" —all the members—composing that church. It

[4] Rom. 14 : 1
[5] 1 Cor. 16 : 3
[6] 2 Cor. 8 : 18-19
[7] Acts 14 : 23
[8] Acts 6 : 2

is not competent, then, to be done—nor is it competent that appointments to any other offices, nor the exercise of any acts of general discipline, be done—by the pastorship, by any number of the ministry, or any other body of men; but by the church only, and by that particular church, exclusively, in which the deacons are to exercise their office.

I cannot but rejoice that our churches, everywhere, on this subject, and all others of a kindred character, are so universally jealous of their rights. They are determined—may that determination remain firm forever—that these rights shall not be usurped, as they have been in so many of the sects around us, and appropriated to themselves by an ambitious and aspiring clergy. Let them carefully maintain the principles of the word of God; let them be guided by its instructions; and, with the truth, the favor of Jehovah, and consequent prosperity, they will, with their own independence, preserve also their usefulness, and continued peace and happiness.

When deacons are to be elected in a new church, or when, in consultation, in one already established, between the pastor and the members, it has been determined that the appointment of additional deacons is necessary, their first duty is to receive, from their

accredited teacher, full instructions on the whole subject. This course is important, not only because it is that adopted and practised by the apostles, but also because it is necessary that, in all such cases, the members should deliberate maturely, with a full knowledge of the matter upon which they are about to act. A false step in the selection of the permanent officers of a church can seldom be retrieved, and must always be productive of the most melancholy consequences. Many a church has been thus overthrown, and the cause crushed, within the circle of its influence, for an age. In the proceedings at Jerusalem "The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men, of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business [the temporalities of the church], but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." These are the topics, and their consideration should be repeated whenever a similar duty is to be performed. After ample time and means have been afforded for reflection and decision, the church, as a body, proceeds to the election. Whether the choice at Jerusalem, which is our perpetual

precedent, was made by direct vote, or by conversation and mutual agreement among themselves, is matter of little consequence. We know, and that is sufficient, that it was by the suffrage of the whole body, and that all elections should still be conducted in the same manner.

The persons designated by any particular church to the Deaconship, must, to render them eligible, be members of its own body. "Look ye out *among you* seven men." This admonition should be invariably regarded, because otherwise they may not be sufficiently known to the members for them to be able to judge as to their qualifications; and because their duties are to be confined to that one church. They cannot, without a new appointment, exercise their office in any other. There is their work, and there they are to conduct themselves "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The property and funds of other churches do not come into their hands, nor, indeed, those designed for other than church purposes. Extraordinary collections for distant brethren and objects were, as we learn from the apostolic history,[9] sent, not to the deacons, but to the elders — the pastors — through whom they reached their appropriate destination. During

[9] Acts 11 : 29-30

the famine, which occurred in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which they did, and sent it to the *elders*, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

At a proper time after their election, the persons designed for deacons are placed, *by the church*, before the ministers, whose duty it is to appoint them. It will doubtless be remembered, that *appointment*, and *ordination*, are two words expressive of the same action. The people *elected* the deacons, and the ministers *ordained* them.

This fact leads me to venture a remark, in passing, in regard to the true principles of ecclesiastical polity. In the government of states, whatever its form, checks and balances between the several departments, are, by experience, found to be necessary to secure the interests of the parties concerned. They have, accordingly, been adopted by all civilized nations. In the church of Christ they are instituted by divine authority. We have now before us a striking example. The ministry have no right to ordain any man to the Deaconship, not previously elected by the church to that office. The consent of the church is positively necessary, otherwise he would be a deacon "at

large"—having no place in which to exercise his functions. On the other hand, though brethren may be elected by the church, they are still, unless ordained by the ministry, not deacons. There must be a concurrence between the church and the ministry to create the officer. True, they do, commonly, concur, but not always, nor is it by any means a matter of course. Similar checks and balances exist with regard to the ordination of pastors and evangelists, and the baptism of candidates for membership in the church. Thus a double guard is thrown around all the most important interests of the kingdom of Messiah.

So much in regard to elections. *The forms of ordination* of the first deacons—and these *we* are sacredly bound always to observe—were simple. They were set before the apostles by the church, expressive of their own action, and the consent and promise of the candidates to fulfil the duties assigned them, "to the best of their knowledge and ability." The Twelve, having approved the choice, prayed. This was the next step. Whether one or more led in the service, is unimportant. Lastly, after they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Thus their appointment was finished, and they were inducted into the Deaconship.

Whether they now received, as with us, more

special and particular instructions, in the form of a "charge," as to their duties, and the importance of their fidelity, we are left without particular information. *We all,* however, need "line upon line" and "precept upon precept," and it cannot be improper thus to address those who are placed in conspicuous and responsible positions in the house of God.

In this manner the election and ordination of the deacons were conducted and completed, and *"the seven"* entered upon their work. The most happy results followed, and will always follow, a similar course. "The word of God increased: and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

With some of these forms, and especially the laying on of hands, there are brethren, in different parts of our country, who propose now to dispense. They offer, as a principal reason, our inability, by that act, to impart any virtue. The apostles, say they, laid their hands on the deacons to communicate, with other endowments, "the gift of the Holy Ghost." This we cannot do. It is, therefore, useless, if not presumptuous, for us to employ the forms. At first view this argument seems reasonable. It at least carries with it the ap-

pearance of humility. When tested, however, it will not, I apprehend, be found unexceptionable.

It is conceded that the apostles did, sometimes, but not always, pray, and lay their hands on persons for the purposes alleged. But this will be found not to have been their design in the ordination of the deacons. In proof of this fact we have only to recur again to the qualifications they were required to possess to justify their election. Among these, it will be remembered, is the following, "Men *full of the Holy Ghost.*" They had already, therefore, *received* those extraordinary endowments, to impart which, our brethren presume, was the object of the forms in question. Since these, then, were necessary to render them eligible, this could not have been the object of the apostle.

Scripture forms are never enjoined, either by precedent or command, without some good and benevolent reason. It is, consequently, always important that they should be strictly observed. If I did not know the design, I would insist, in all cases, upon the form. But is this difficult to ascertain? I presume not. It appears to me to have been nothing more than the solemn benediction, and official recognition of the officers thus formally appointed. Of all

this, it cannot be irreverent for us to say, modern ministers are fully as capable as were the apostles themselves. Let us, therefore, brethren, sedulously adhere to those forms, whatever they may be, that we find prescribed in the word of God.

Thus have we considered and determined by whom the deacons are to be elected; the instructions to be given to the church before the election; the manner in which the election is to be conducted; the checks and balances instituted in the government of the church; the ordaining form; the charge to be given after ordination; and the duty of adhering, in this and all other cases, strictly to apostolic usage.

# 4

## General Duties of Deacons

If the prosperity of the church is, in any degree, dependent on the prompt and effectual performance of the duties belonging to the Deaconship, those who are appointed to that office must know what those duties are, their nature, extent, and obligation. Without this they can never be discharged. How can men do things of which they know nothing? For all practical ends, we had as well be without deacons as to have those who are ignorant, incompetent, or unfaithful. They are not only useless, but positively hurtful to the churches. They cannot but inflict the most serious injuries.

What are *the duties of Deacons?* Let us apply ourselves diligently, in the light of the word of God, to an examination of this question. And as it has two sides, a negative and a positive one, we will first consider the former.

*It is not the duty of the Deacons to preach.* We assumed this proposition in our first chapter, and made then but a passing remark, promising to recur to it again. We now proceed to discuss it more fully. In half the denominations around us, as we have before

seen, the deacons are preachers. We are therefore admonished, maintaining as we do the directly opposite doctrines, to be cautious in our words, and conclusive in our arguments.

The reasons alleged for the appointment of deacons are sufficient proof that they are not, and never were, designed to preach.

1. Every church has, necessarily, a *temporal* as well as a *spiritual* department. It must, as we have before said, have its place of worship, its pastor, its poor, and expenses of various kinds, requiring money and property. These constitute the former. The latter embraces worship and instruction — "prayer, and the ministry of the word." This was true of the church in Jerusalem. Originally both these departments were in the hands of the apostles. Turn again to the history of the origin of the Deaconship, and recollect that the reasons for the appointment of these officers were, that the preachers might be relieved from the management of secular interests, by placing them under the direction of others. This point has already been sufficiently considered.

2. The duties of the deacons are presented to us by the apostles themselves, as the opposite of the duties of the ministry. Let *them*, said they, in their instructions to the church at the time of their election, attend to your

temporal affairs, and "*we* will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." It was never designed then, by either the apostles or the church, that the deacons should preach. On the contrary, they elected to the office those who did not preach, and because they did not preach. This argument has also before been discussed.

3. Consider the two facts now before you, and it appears to me to be impossible to suppose that the deacons were or ought to be preachers, without censuring the intelligence both of the apostles and the primitive church. It was their professed design in creating the office to relieve the ministry from the administration of the church's temporalities, and they appointed to discharge this duty those who did not preach, and because they did not preach. These facts cannot be disputed. Were the deacons, after all, ministers of the word? Then the apostles and the church did not do what they intended! The matter rested precisely where it was before. The ministry still had the charge of everything, in both the temporal and spiritual departments! Such a conclusion is immeasurably preposterous.

4. Is it objected to me that Philip, "one of the seven," did preach and baptize?[1] I admit

[1] Acts 8 : 5, 38

the statement to be true; but at the same time must confess that I cannot see how this weakens my argument at all, since it occurred many years afterward; and these actions were especially performed, not in his character as a deacon, but in his office as an evangelist. The inspired writer is at pains lest, as it would seem, we might not understand the matter fully, to inform us of this change in the official relations of Philip. He was *now* a minister of the gospel. Deacons, as well as other men, *may be called* of God to the ministry. If called, it is their duty to obey. They then, however, as Philip did, drop the office of a deacon and assume that of a minister. No other of the seven, so far as we know, ever preached. Why did they not? If deacons are ministers, it was their duty. They all did their duty, but they did not preach. Therefore it was not their duty to preach.

We now see that deacons are not preachers, because preaching was not the design had in view in the creation of the office; because their duties, as defined by the apostles, are the opposite of those of preachers; because they were especially appointed to superintend the church's temporal department; and because no deacons as such, in primitive times, did preach, although they fully performed their duty. And

if the design and purposes of God have not changed since the beginning, and no one will maintain this, it is still the duty of deacons not to preach, but to superintend the same important interests originally committed to their charge.

*It is not,* I next, and most heartily, observe, *the duty of deacons to administer the ordinances of religion.*

The administration of the ordinances is admitted, on all sides, to be the prerogative of the ministry. If this be a correct conclusion, and if we have proved that deacons are not ministers, the argument demonstrates beyond doubt that they are not competent to the work. Their office confers upon them no authority to administer ordinances. They generally receive, at the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine from the hands of the pastor, and distribute them to the communicants. This, however, is not by authority, but only as a matter of convenience. Any other persons might do the same thing. Nor is this, in any sense, the administration by them of the eucharist more than habiting and attending a candidate at baptism is the administration of baptism. Deacons were employed thus at a very early period. It is becoming and suitable, and therefore not improper.

*It is not, lastly, the duty of the deacons to rule in the church.*

They administer of course their own department, and rule there and to that extent. The pastors, in *their* department, are said to "have the rule." As officers of the church, they each, in their own sphere, are rulers, in the same sense that officers of the civil government are rulers. They are not legislators nor judges, but simply executors of the law of Christ. Like them they are, both pastors and deacons, the servants of the people, to be guided by God's word, and have not a particle of peculiar authority beyond the precincts of their respective offices. Their rule cannot therefore encroach upon the rights of any member. In the whole of the government and discipline of the church, the most inconsiderable communicant has all the immunities and privileges that belong to either deacons or pastors. Why should it not be so? Every member is alike interested, and has the same at stake. Each has an equal right, and in proportion to his religious standing and intelligence, may make himself felt. These facts stimulate him to more vigorous and constant exertion. All are called upon to assume responsibilities, and to bear their parts, and act under a consciousness that they fill some space in the great work of salva-

tion. As a necessary consequence they are compelled to think, study the word of God, and be impressed with a sense of the magnitude of that account they must one day give at the judgment bar. Thus the mass are elevated in the scale of intellectuality, piety, and usefulness. If talents exist among them they are called forth in the cause of Christ; and real worth soon finds its appropriate position. How wise and salutary, therefore, is the inspired polity of the kingdom of the Redeemer! In these, as much as in any other considerations, is evinced the superiority of that form of ecclesiastical government which Jehovah has established in his word, above all the numerous systems devised and substituted for it by the wisdom of men. Deacons, except in their own peculiar department, have no rule in the church, in any sense, not common to all the members of "the household of faith."

Referring to this topic, Doctor Gill remarks: "Deacons may, and should be, assistants to pastors and elders in the care of the church—as to watch over the walk and conversation of the members of the church, and to observe that they keep their places in it; and to exhort, admonish, and reprove, as they may find it necessary; . . . to report the state of the church to the elder or pastor, and to reconcile differences

between one member and another, and to prepare matters to be laid before the church at church meetings, when needful."[2] The services here enumerated are certainly very important. They should be carefully and diligently employed. I am surprised, however, to find Doctor Gill classing them among the peculiar duties of the Deaconship. If he means to say that they of right belong to that office, I question much whether in this case he has not been led aside from his usual accuracy of judgment. The Deaconship does not appear to me to embrace them as a matter of course. They belong alike to all members of the church, and I seriously doubt whether they can be appropriated to any specified individuals or officers, without so taking away the sense of responsibility and duty of the whole as materially to injure the efficiency of the body. If it be found, by fair experiment, that the members will not discharge these obligations, they may, by a special act of the church, be submitted temporarily to the deacons; or the church may appoint a standing committee on discipline, charged with their performance. Either of these methods may not be without advantage, provided they are not pursued as a permanent policy; and by adopting it too much indifference among

[2] *Body of Divinity*, Vol. III, p. 269

the members generally, in regard to the conduct of each other and the discipline of the church, is not thereby encouraged. This department, substantially, has, in some denominations, been put in charge of *"Elders who rule, but do not preach."* Their office, however, is a human device, has no authority in the word of God, infringes the rights of others, and cannot, consequently, be exercised without detriment to all concerned. Deacons are not ruling elders. The church is free, made so by Christ, and is commended to "stand fast in that liberty." Guided by divine revelation, she is fully competent to govern herself.

Thus we have considered the negative side of the subject—what are not the duties of deacons. Let us now proceed to address ourselves to the opposite branch, and determine what obligations really devolve upon them.

By the divine law, we repeat it, they are placed over all the temporalities of the church.

For this specific and definite purpose, and for no other, they were appointed. All the property and funds which belong to the church, *as a church,* are placed under their direction. Their command over them, however, is not absolute, but limited to such uses as the church may order. The benefit of the whole body is the object, and she of necessity retains the

right of appropriation. The gospel has created certain standing regulations, which the church makes definite, as those to the pastor and others. These must be met regularly and promptly at the time appointed. Neglects sometimes are indulged in by the deacons, in this respect, which are often attended with the most melancholy results. Decisive promptness is always of the utmost consequence. Men of business require it, and so should the church of Christ.

The fact that the deacons are officially the depositories, not of all that the members possess, but of all the common property and funds of the church, created and held by her for the purposes of religion, gives them the peculiar relation which they sustain to her ordinary and incidental expenses, to the wants of the poor, and to the sustenance of her pastor. All their peculiar duties grow out of this single fact. They therefore defray, I remark, in the first place, the expenses arising from the convenient disposition of the house of God, and the regular and proper administration of the ordinances of the gospel. These, in many instances, are very inconsiderable; in others they are by no means small; yet they are all necessary, and, small or large, must be incurred.

Let us indulge in a little particularity. The

house of worship must be comfortable in itself. At night it must be lighted; in summer it must be ventilated; and in the winter it must be warmed. The services, consequently, of a sexton, or some one to take charge of it, must be procured, who will perform these necessary duties. Janitors, too, in many churches, are indispensable.

Baptism must be administered, God's word commands: "Let all things be done *decently* and in *order*." Baptism is surely among these "*all things*." But it cannot be fitly dispensed, unless we have a suitable place prepared, and the candidates, in receiving the ordinance, be properly habited and attended. When appropriately ordered, how striking, how beautiful, how impressive, how solemn, is baptism. Thousands have been convinced of sin, and guided to the service of God by the simple witnessing of this holy rite. But how often is all its touching influence lost, and does even the ordinance itself become, to many, repulsive, for want of the Scriptural attention to its circumstances—decency and order? From our censurable neglect in conducting these very particulars, most serious evil has resulted. Thence the opposers of apostolic baptism have drawn their most effective arguments against it. They point to our slovenly acts reproach-

fully, and multitudes who witness them shrink from the idea of a similar personal exposure. Shall we, while substantially obedient to the rite as a whole, make ourselves transgressors, by violating the law of God in relation to its circumstances? Shall we permit our strength thus to become weakness, and our good, evil? Few of our churches, I fear, and especially in country places, are without sin in this particular.

The table of the Lord must frequently be spread. The necessary furniture for the purpose, as well as the elements, must be provided and superintended.

Not infrequently the church invites evangelists, or neighboring ministers, to aid their pastor on special occasions. Their expenses are to be paid, and their toils compensated. David would not offer to God a sacrifice which cost him nothing. Shall the church of Christ offer to God sacrifices that not only cost *her* nothing, but are unjustly wrung from the labors of her impoverished pastorship? This act is beneath her, and should never be permitted to sully the escutcheon of her honor.

But who are to superintend, regulate, and carry all these important arrangements into effect? Too often, as we have melancholy evidence, they are most painfully overlooked,

and, in many respects, totally disregarded. They constitute one great branch of the duties of the Deaconship. They are responsible for whatever, in these and similar things, the reputation and interest of our holy religion may require. The means have been, or should be, placed in their hands for the purposes enumerated, and they must not only disburse them, but give, at the same time, so much of their personal attention and service as may be necessary.

I next observe, that the duties of the deacons require them to administer to the wants of the poor, the distressed, the afflicted, the fatherless, and the widows of the household of faith, and especially of their own particular church.

One of the great excellencies of religion is its affectionate care, extended to all these classes of our fellow beings. Those who enter fully into its benevolent feelings have the peculiar benedictions of heaven. It is God who has said: "Blessed is he who considereth the poor." What we do for the relief of the necessitous of all grades, our Redeemer chooses to consider as done to himself. "I was an hungered," said he, "and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me;

I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me." But when and how did we all this? He himself answers: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."[3] And yet more—we are assured, by divine authority, if there are any who have no sympathy with the suffering and dependent, then they prove thereby that they have no religion. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him."[4] And again, "Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."[5] I shall only add, in the words of our Saviour, "Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good."[6]

Such are the teachings of the word of God.

With them every true Christian is most anxious to comply. The obligation rests upon all to feed the hungry, to extend hospitality to the stranger, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to relieve the distressed, and to provide

[3] Matt. 26: 35-41
[4] 1 John 3: 17
[5] James 1: 27
[6] Mark 14: 7

for the orphan and the widow in their affliction. In their individual capacities, they should do, in this behalf, whatever they may find practicable. But a few persons cannot accomplish, alone and unaided by others, all that may be necessary or desired. Each one, except in rare instances, can only do a small part. The church, therefore, unites all her members for its successful prosecution. Every one contributes what he is able, and the privilege is allowed to all. The sums thus procured are placed in the hands of the deacons, who are the divinely appointed almoners of their bounty. So zealous and constant were primitive Christians in these acts of gospel benevolence, that they thereby attracted the admiration of the whole world. Julian the Apostate, Emperor of Rome, one of their bitterest enemies, insists in his writings,[7] that they did as much, in this way, for the spread of their principles, as they did even by the preaching of the gospel, censuring, at the same time, the pagans for their careless neglect. All were compelled to exclaim: "See how these Christians love one another."

How beautifully benign are the purposes of the gospel! They are indeed worthy of a religion which proposes to humanize and bless the

[7] Dwight's *Theol.*, Vol. IV, p. 295

world, as well as to prepare the soul for heaven! How effective, when Scripturally administered, is the church—the divine organization—for their prosecution! It is from God, and therefore suitable. But have *we* not *now* painfully declined from the spirit and zeal of early times? Where, in this behalf, are our "works of faith, and labors of love"? Is it not true that some societies around us are much more attentive and faithful than is even the church of Christ? When I see these merely human associations relieving their poor, supporting their dependent widows, and rearing and carefully educating the orphans of their deceased members, and by the bedside of their sick day and night while they live, and kindly rendering the last offices of affection when dead, I can but blush for the criminal negligence of the people of God. Can it be, that those who do not profess to be influenced by the same exalted motives that guide us, who look no higher than to friendship and humanity, shall so far outstrip us in the race of love and benevolence? Brethren, deacons, ministers, shall this reproach continue? When will the church arise to a proper sense of her own dignity and duty in this department of her labors?

These duties, in their performance, neces-

sarily involve another. Much visiting by the deacons will, I apprehend, be found positively indispensable.

Without this, especially among the classes to be benefited, how can they know who they are, and become sufficiently familiar with all their circumstances and wants to guide them in the measures most proper to be adopted? And to keep up the required knowledge the process must be perpetuated. There are those who do not need pecuniary aid, but only advice, and perhaps assistance in procuring employment. In other cases the gratuity bestowed will be of little service unless personal attentions are added. This is true in numerous examples, but especially in the instances of the orphan children of our brethren and sisters who die in poverty. Duty requires that the church should rear all such, educate them, and prepare them for usefulness in life. Yet other examples are constantly occurring, of persons who are not by any means poor or dependent, but to whom we must look with as much care as to those who are. The heart that is in affliction is soothed and comforted by our fraternal sympathy. Our presence in the sick chamber of a brother or a sister is often of great consequence. Such attentions are infinitely more valuable than gold. When the deacons cannot

give them, individually, they should call upon others, and no benevolent heart, if possible to do otherwise, would decline a service so sacred. Brethren, "To do good and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Some of the duties of the Deaconship now enumerated will always be agreeable, often delightful. They will occasionally find, among those to whom they minister, elegant simplicity, mingled with intelligence and fervent piety. Again, their work will be not a little repulsive. It is no grateful task to scour the numerous lanes and by-ways of our cities and country; and thrust ourselves into the hovels of ignorance, wretchedness and disease. But the labor is not more arduous than it is holy and godlike, and those who perform it shall not, even in this world, lose their reward. "For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

These comprehend most of the general duties of the deacons—not to preach, not to administer ordinances, not to rule, except in their own department; but, as they are placed over all the temporal affairs of the church, they defray, not from their own means but from

the treasury, the ordinary and incidental expenses of divine worship, and have charge of the poor, the dependent, the afflicted, the widow, and the fatherless.

It is proper for us now to consider the duties of deacons with reference to the pastorship. This, however, must occupy the next chapter.

# 5

## Duties of Deacons With Reference to Pastors

As the superintendent of all the temporalities of the church, the duties of the deacons require them to see that their pastor receive a competent temporal support.

Here I apprehend they will meet, unless they have a wisely constructed scheme of finance in successful operation, the greater part of their labor and difficulty. A much larger amount is necessary for pastoral sustenance than is needful for general purposes; and a regular and uninterrupted supply is absolutely indispensable. If it should fail even for a few months, the whole machinery must cease; because pastors, without food and raiment and a place of shelter, if dependent, as they usually are, wholly upon the church, can neither preach nor adequately discharge any other of the claims of their office.

Let us examine briefly, since it is immediately connected with the Deaconship, the general subject of pastoral support.

The law of the kingdom of Christ guarantees thus much to the preacher, as a proper

return from those whom he serves. The provision is, indeed, not peculiar to the gospel, it is founded in reason and justice, and has fully obtained in all nations and ages. Even among idolators and pagans the ministers of religion are sustained by their religion. This principle is taught in the law of Moses.

The priests were made dependent for the means of life upon their spiritual avocation. Beyond the house in which they resided they were not allowed any possession in the land of Canaan. The Lord said unto Aaron: "Thou shalt have no inheritance in the land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. I am thy part, and thine inheritance, among the children of Israel."[1] Again, "The Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister unto him, and to bless his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren. The Lord is his inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him."[2] And again, "The Levite that is within thy gates, thou shalt not forsake him, for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee."[3] Yet again, "The priests, the Levites,

[1] Num. 18 : 20
[2] Deut. 10 : 8-9
[3] Deut. 14 : 27

and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore, they shall have no inheritance among their brethren. The Lord is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them."[4] Once more, "The Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance."

The manner in which the priests under the law received their compensations, was so mingled with the performance of the duties of their office, that the neglect of one was the loss of the other. But to the faithful there was no want. Thus it is seen that under the former economy ample provisions were made for the comfortable sustenance of the ministers of religion.

Substantially, the same provisions are continued under the gospel. The forms are abrogated, but the principle is retained. An apostle was certainly of this opinion when he said to the Corinthians, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things [under the law], live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so [under the gospel], hath the Lord *ordained,* that they which preach

[4] Deut. 18 : 1-2

the gospel should live of the gospel."[5] Justice and right are immutable. And while the word of God requires a *ministry* for its propagation and defense, so long will those who are devoted to this work be *authorized to claim* such temporal support as their circumstances may require, and as may be rendered practicable or proper by the condition of the people under their charge.

This, Paul says, is not only the law of the Mosaic economy, but the *Lord has ordained it* under the gospel. Christ has ordained, enacted a statute, established a law, that "those who preach the gospel shall live of the gospel." In a synopsis, it may be stated thus. "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go—and as ye go, preach. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip [provisions] for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves [weapons of defence]; *for the workman is worthy of his meat.*"[6] This has regard to the apostles. But it was repeated for the government of the seventy disciples, and almost in the same words. It may be thus abridged: "The Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent *them* two and two, before his face, into

[5] 1 Cor. 9 : 13-14
[6] Matt. 10 : 5-10

every city whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them—go your ways—carry neither purse nor scrip, nor shoes—*for the laborer is worthy of his hire.*"[7] The same law, Paul tells us, in the passage recited, is applicable and perpetually binding, as to all those, in every age, who, with the proper sanctions, preach the gospel. Its provisions relate exclusively to ministers, and regard solely their temporal support and comfort. Such is the law, or *ordinance* of our Lord, brought forward as authority by the apostle, and which secures to the minister, whether he be pastor, evangelist, or missionary, food, and clothing, and shelter, and whatever else his wants may render necessary, so long as he may be faithfully employed in his sacred calling.

As might naturally be supposed, both the *teaching* and the *practise* of the apostles are in accordance with this principle. We will examine them separately.

The apostolic *teaching*, in regard to ministerial support, is very plain and decided.

Referring to this subject, Paul thus addresses himself to the Corinthians: "Who goeth a warfare, any time, at his own charges? Who planeth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eat-

[7] Luke 10 : 12

eth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? Or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written; that he that ploweth should plow in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we should reap your carnal things?"[8] To present, in other words, the sum of the apostle's argument: God is careful even for oxen, and has stipulated by law, that those for whom they toil should suitably provide for their wants. They shall not be muzzled. Can he be less careful for his ministers? He also requires their support. If they plow, and sow, and reap, and thresh in your fields, you cannot do less for them than you do for your oxen. If they labor for your instruction and salvation, and thus "sow unto you spiritual things," their support from your "carnal things" is a small matter. You have done no "great things" when it is freely and promptly given.

The Galatians were impressed with the same lesson. "Let him that is taught in the word

[8] 1 Cor. 9:7-11

communicate to him that teacheth in all good things."[9] He who receives instruction in Christianity, by the public preaching of the word—having become a party to the pastoral compact, for this passage refers directly to the pastorship—is, by the gospel, required to aid in supporting the teacher. Some of the Galatian believers, it would seem, were willing, and such probably may be found among us, to receive the benefits of the Christian ministry without contributing to sustain it! Such a spirit and conduct are here, by the Holy Ghost, condemned as ungrateful, unjust, and unworthy a disciple of the Redeemer.

Numerous other passages might be adduced, almost any of which is decisive as to the teachings of the apostles. The whole, taken together, cannot be resisted.

But what was their *practise?* Did they and the evangelists actually, as a general rule, while they preached to the people, *receive* support *from them?* This has been doubted by candid men, both ministers and others, on account, it would appear, of the statements of Paul to some of the churches, that he had not received aid from them, but while he labored in their service had supported himself.

The ministers of the gospel certainly re-

[9] Gal. 6:6

ceived before the crucifixion, according to the ordinance, the law, of Christ, all needful support from the people. When the *Twelve,* and the *Seventy,* sent out in the manner already described, had finished their mission and returned to their master, Christ said to them: "When I send you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, [We lacked] nothing."[10] They, therefore, were comfortably fed, clothed, and lodged, and as some had families, even more than this must have been given by the people to whom they preached, and actually *received* by them.

The proof is not less conclusive, that during the Apostolic age the same condition of things was continued. Paul, when preaching at Philippi, thus wrote to the Corinthians: "I am glad of the coming of Stephanus, and Fortunatus, and Achaicus; for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied."[11] To the Philippians, while at Rome, the same apostle thus addresses himself: "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica, ye sent once and again

[10] Luke 22 : 35
[11] 1 Cor. 16 : 17.

unto my necessities. [Now] I have all things and abound. I am full; having received of Epaphroditus the *things* which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God. [And] My God shall supply all *your* needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."[12] To the Corinthians he says: "I robbed other churches, *taking wages* of them, to do you service. And when I was with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man [of you], for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied."[13]

Who that reads these, and similar passages, can longer seriously question whether the apostles and evangelists accepted, and received the support as pastors and other ministers must now do, which they needed; which the people, as a religious duty, offered; and which it was their right to claim, by the law of the King in Zion.

I do not, however, maintain that all professed ministers should be provided with a temporal support by the church. And for the instruction of deacons in this particular, as to their duty, it is necessary that we shall suggest the discriminations which are to be made.

[12] Phil. 4 : 15-19
[13] 2 Cor. 11 : 8-9

Those who are entitled to support *must be true ministers of Jesus Christ;* and they *must fully do the work of the ministry.*

The first and most important qualification of a true minister is, that he who claims this character shall be a true Christian—born of the Spirit of God, and possess high and spiritual endowments. As a second qualification he must have united himself with the true church, and he must have received her approval of his devoting himself to the work of the ministry. This sanction consists in her own official act, expressing her opinion that he is called of God, and qualified for the work; and his regular ordination by a lawfully constituted presbytery. His third qualification embraces his ability to teach, which involves the power of perception, facility of utterance, and a competent knowledge of the word of God. Lastly, his life and doctrine must accord with the teachings of divine revelation. He cannot be a legitimate minister of Christ who does not preach, and practise, and live, according to the gospel. These four qualifications must combine to make a man a true minister of Christ.

But a man may be such a minister and yet devote himself but very partially to the work of preaching. If, in other respects, he is unexceptionable but is a farmer, a merchant, a

schoolteacher, or something else, and preaches only when he can do so without material injury to his main pursuits, I do not think him entitled to any support. If he give only part of his time and thoughts, a small compensation, if anything, only is due. To such, I cannot doubt, the apostle alludes when he says, "Let the elders [bishops, pastors] who rule well, be counted worthy of double honor [*διπλῆς τιμῆς*, double reward, stipend, wages], especially they who labor in word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn."[14] That this text has reference to pastoral support, is certainly true for *three* reasons. The first is the title of the person named. He is a presbyter, elder, bishop. Not a man who rules, but does not preach, because such an officer is unknown to the word of God; but a minister who preaches and rules with diligence and fidelity. The second is, the sense of the word *τιμῆς*, rendered in our common version *honor*. That it means that kind of *honor* which embraces *wages*, or *reward*, is admitted by all critics of any pretensions. The last reason, is the cause assigned for double wages to the faithful bishop, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the laborer is

[14] 1 Tim 5:17-18

worthy of his reward." Such an elder—bishop, or pastor—who is faithful and devoted, is entitled to a full support, because he must devote all his time, talents, and energy, to the work. But, on the other hand, he who sacrifices and labors less, is entitled to very little reward.

But are we authorized to fix previously a definite amount to be paid to those who preach the gospel—to offer him a stipulated salary?

Why, I ask, are we not? It appears to me to be necessary and proper for three reasons. Under the law, the precedent from which Paul constantly reasons on this subject, the amount, all must confess, which was awarded to the ministers of religion, was fixed, definite, and previously appointed, the tithe of all their increase. The terms employed by the New Testament, teach the same doctrine. Ministerial support is called their *"wages,"* their *"hire,"* and their *"reward."*

These words certainly describe a specific sum. Reason also requires that it should be so. Every minister, if he is dependent, and intends to maintain his character as an honorable man, ought, beforehand, to know what amount he may rely upon, otherwise, as he must incur debts for the means of life, and may, confidently, expect from the church more than he will receive, he is liable to be over-

whelmed at any time. Indeed he can hardly hope to escape inextricable injury. The amount, therefore, whatever it may be, that a minister—pastor or evangelist—receives, is required to be previously fixed and agreed upon by the parties interested.

Having now seen the law of ministerial support, and the teaching and practise of the apostles, let us consider for a moment the abstract *reason* and *justice* of the case.

If a man discharge the duties of any office to which he is legitimately called, it is reasonable and just that, from the community he serves, he should receive for his time, labor, and expense, a suitable compensation. But is not the principle as applicable to the ministry as to any other office? Is it not as unjust to withhold the rights of ministers as of any other class of men?

Besides this, when the pastoral or ministerial relation is formed, the church, by the stipulations of the parties, engages to pay to him certain sums, at specified times, for official services. If the services are rendered, the amount promised is, in the fullest sense, a debt, which the church is as much under obligation to pay as any other debt whatever. If, without necessity, it is withheld, or all suitable efforts are not made by herself, and by her

officers appointed to conduct her pecuniary affairs, she brings upon herself dishonor, and the sin of fraudulently refusing to comply with an honest contract, after the considerations have been rendered. This act appears the more criminal because these are sacred debts, contracted to facilitate the progress of the gospel, whose teachings the church violates by the non-payment; and because they are debts of honor, there being no means by which the defrauded minister can enforce the collection.

But why should the minister place himself in such a condition as to become thus dependent upon the church? The necessity, I answer, arises from two causes: the constitution of the human mind, and the commands of God.

The preaching of the gospel requires the undivided energies of the strongest and most cultivated powers. Can its purposes be gained, therefore, by a slight and casual attention? Such is the character of the mind that all its strength must be directed to one object, or it can never be prosecuted with full success. The lawyer, the physician, the mechanic, the politician, know this, and direct their course accordingly. Shall not the minister be equally wise? Does his sacred calling deserve less attention than mere worldly pursuits?

But the commandment of God requires his exclusive devotion to the ministry. "Give thyself wholly to these things, that thy profiting may appear to all." This demand, although paramount, is not without its reasons. So numerous are the duties of the ministry, especially of the pastorship, out of the pulpit as well as in it—important civic and community functions — that if they discharge them all, with but tolerable attention, they will leave no time to devote to any other pursuits.

But, some one inquires, could not our minister do something else, besides preaching? If he would, he might materially aid in sustaining himself, and lighten essentially our burdens in providing for his support! Thus, but too frequently, talk the members of our churches. I answer, Yes, the minister certainly *could* embark in temporal business, and, probably, prosecute it successfully. The loss, except of conscience, and ministerial prosperity, would not be his. In every worldly sense he would reap immense advantage. The churches, and the cause, would be the sufferers. But let us make a similar and equally rational inquiry. Could not our schoolmasters do something else besides teaching, to aid in supporting themselves? They could then teach our children for a much less sum, and thus greatly

diminish our burdens in educating them. Could not our lawyers and physicians do something else to support themselves? Then they could attend to our business and our health for almost nothing. This would be extremely convenient, especially to those of us who love our money more than we do honor, religion, or justice. But with regard to other men, we never think of such questions. Why then do we, with regard to ministers?

Reason and justice, therefore, concur with the word of God, and teach us that the minister is to be competently supported. But this is, almost always, a most difficult work. How can it be accomplished? It never can, with regularity and success, unless the plans adopted be wisely formed and vigorously prosecuted. The obligation rests upon the whole church. But that which is left to a whole community, and not intrusted to any special or official superintendence, will certainly never be done. "What is everybody's business is nobody's business." This is as true of the church as it is of the world. Jehovah has made adequate provision. The deacons are appointed over all the temporal affairs of the church, and, of course, this also must be under their special charge.

The pastor, when he enters upon his trust,

looks to the church to say what support she will offer. When she has spoken, and he has accepted her proposition, he has, while he performs the duties of his station, no more to say to the members generally on that subject except to teach them their duty. To him the deacons, and they only, are responsible. They are the permanent financial officers. They stand between the church and the ministry, are fully informed as to their relative condition, and should be ever ready to do their duty to both.

I am here reminded, perhaps, that the churches sometimes enter upon their records promises to pay to their pastors certain amounts, at certain times, but do not place the stipulated sums in the hands of the deacons, and, therefore, compliance is impossible. But is not this exceedingly wrong — highly criminal? Should grave, thoughtful, Christian men so act? Should they suffer themselves in a moment of excitement, when highly pleased with the efforts of ministers, to induce them to accept pastorships and undergo labors, by promises which they afterwards fail to fulfil? Hasty and inconsiderate pastorships, formed under the influence of mutual excitement, and accompanied by large promises and high expectations, like marriages contracted in similar

circumstances, are seldom productive of lasting happiness.

When Congress, or a state legislature, propose to make an appropriation, specific or annual, for any purpose, however desirable, they always inquire into the condition of the treasury, or the sources of revenue, generally both, and are sedulous not to contract obligations which they either cannot, or will not, promptly discharge. Their financial officers are called upon to apprise them how far they may venture, and are ready to utter their warning if they find them going beyond their abilities. Shall the church be less careful? Is not her honor as dear, are not her debts as sacred, as those of the state? The deacons should never permit the church to promise her pastor a larger sum than they are confident she will be able and willing to pay; nor that payments will be made at certain times, unless there exists a fair prospect of compliance. If they find that the church has already acted thus imprudently, they should instantly apprise him of the fact. And further: If, at any time, they perceive that the abilities of the church are unequal to the continuance of what she has formerly done, they should not leave the pastor to make the discovery, for the first time, by their nearly total failure to meet their obli-

gations; and that too, perhaps, after, upon the faith of their pledges, he has involved himself in liabilities from which he finds it now impossible to be delivered.

To guard all these points effectually, it will readily be seen, that every engagement, involving temporal considerations, between the churches and their pastors, should be made, invariably, through the agency of the deacons. And in all our transactions, in relation to this whole department, our intercourse should be always governed by the utmost sincerity and frankness.

# 6

## Revenues of the Church

No organized community, political or religious, can long exist without a regular revenue to support its necessary expenses. This is a self-evident proposition; and if it were not, we have but too many melancholy proofs of its truth. Not a few churches in different parts of our country have attempted to conduct their affairs without cost. The result has invariably been, where the experiment has been continued through many years, that they have gone down, and many of them become for ever extinct. It is folly to suppose that it can ever be otherwise. God, in his providence, has ordered that without appropriate exertions nothing valuable shall be produced. Can a city or a state keep up its organization without revenues, and these too regularly accruing? No more can a church of Christ. But more than this—Jehovah has ordered the appointment, in his kingdom, of financial officers. This would be a strange procedure if he intended that the church should have no treasury. He has also given us laws by which to create the necessary income, and to bring it into their hands. These facts suggest and

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involve all that is necessary for us to do in the premises.

When the first deacons were appointed, "the disciples," as we have seen, "had all things common." "The *seven*" were, therefore, actually in possession of all that belonged to the whole community. No man had any property or funds of his own. All had been voluntarily relinquished. But then their duties were so much the more numerous, and their labors exceedingly great. This condition of things soon passed away. The gospel now requires us to retain our possessions, and authorizes its institutions to be sustained only by such offerings as may be freely given. The question presents itself to us, as to the measures by which this matter can be so regulated, as that what is given may assume, in amount, that definiteness and certainty which the object demands.

In order to do this, the deacons, in the beginning of each year, should prepare and place before the church an estimate of her expenses for that period. They can always do so in a manner sufficiently correct for all practical purposes. Such is the initiatory measure, and two principal reasons render it imperative. In the first place, it is necessary for us to know to what extent we must exert ourselves, or we have not the means of deciding how we

shall act. Let us be informed as to what is to be done, and we are then prepared to do it. Secondly, when the whole matter is explained, fully understood, and has received the assent of all, we shall proceed with cheerfulness and alacrity. Otherwise more or less darkness and embarrassment must always rest upon the church in her efforts to secure the required funds. Let the annual estimate by the deacons, therefore, never be neglected.

As we have seen, in this, and the two preceding chapters, that God designs that the necessary revenues shall be created, the church is, of course, obliged to go forward in the performance of this duty. The obligation rests alike upon all, and each is expected to make a free-will offering according to his or her ability, for the maintenance of the cause. Some churches have investments of various kinds, the profits of which are so applied. Others make their seats sources of revenue. Others, still, have a preference to subscriptions and donations. And yet others choose to mingle these plans. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." I can perceive nothing improper in them, provided they are so conducted as to harmonize with the divine law, are approved by the particular church concerned, and are adequate to the purposes in

view. In this whole matter the utmost openness and candor should always be maintained. No bickerings, if they can possibly be prevented, should ever arise, on any subject, especially relating to mere pecuniary affairs.

I wish, however, to call attention to a special *Divine statute,* enacted for general purposes, and which may apply, therefore, to the support of a particular church, as well as to *distant objects of benevolence,* about which, in various quarters, much has of late been said, particularly in connection with the work of missions. It is in these words:

"Upon the first day of the week [the Lord's day] let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him,"[1] for the purposes of religion. This is the law of the Divine Ruler, delivered by an apostle, and it is obligatory upon us all. Does any one exclaim, "What, money on the *Lord's day!* Must we, on that day, be counting *our treasures,* and determining our *profits!* Why, money and religion must not be thought of together!" It *is possible,* and the fact should be remembered that this feeling, supposed to be so holy, *may* be far otherwise. Indeed, it may be, and often is, prompted by a worldly and avaricious disposition. It is no evidence of our humility and

[1] 1 Cor. 16:2

piety, that we become wiser than Christ, and refuse to obey him, lest we should thereby contract sin. We are commanded to serve God with our *substance,* and the first-fruits of *all our increase.* We should also remember that "It is lawful for us to *do good* on the Sabbath day." Besides, obedience to this injunction so connects our business pursuits and profits with the service of God, as essential to crush the inherent worldliness of our nature, and lead us to that habitual spirituality of mind, so necessary, in business and in pleasure, to be constantly cultivated. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The excellency of the laws that govern this department is manifest, in the first place, in the fact that they compel a weekly settlement with God. How easy is this, if done in time! But it is not so afterward. If our accounts with him are permitted to run through any very long period, they either pass from our minds, and are never adjusted; or they mount up to so large a sum, that we think ourselves unprepared to meet it, and are tempted to withhold it, and to refuse his rights. We are never safe in disobedience to the obligation which requires the duty prescribed to be performed *on the first day of every week.*

In the second place, it will be seen that the

contribution here demanded is to be universal. This is another excellency of the divine plan. "Let *every one* of you lay by him in store." No man is so poor that the obligation does not reach him. None are excused this year because they liberally contributed the last. Debts, cares, responsibilities, contributions for other objects, are not sufficient apologies for not sustaining our own church. All are equally interested, and *"every one"* must take part in the work. In the act of joining the church we pledge ourselves to obey Christ in this as well as in every other respect. The solemn obligation can never be cancelled, until death shall close our earthly labors.

These contributions, I observe, in the third place, can always be readily afforded, because they are never disproportioned to our circumstances, they are to be rendered each week *"as God hath prospered us."* "It is required of a man according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not." What we do is to be graduated by the measure of our prosperity. He, it would seem, thus calls upon us to look to him in our temporal, as well as our spiritual interests, with the intimation that, by giving us prosperity, or sending upon us adversity, he will regulate his own treasury. If he wants much he will indicate it by his

greater temporal blessings. If we refuse his service, he sends upon us a chastisement for our unfaithfulness, calamity, and distress, either in our property, or in ourselves, or in both.

In the last place, since the wants of Christ's kingdom must regularly continue, and thus impose upon his people perpetually recurring obligations, he demands our contributions regularly, *each week.* On the morning of every Lord's day, we must review our temporal affairs for the week; ascertain the extent of the divine favor which we have enjoyed; and make such a pecuniary expression of our sense of gratitude as an enlightened conscience may dictate; *laying by us in store* for the kingdom of Christ; that our own and the contributions of others may make up a sufficient revenue.

In many places, and especially with reference to her own necessary individual expenditures, the church returns to her contributors a consideration, in seats and other immunities in the house of worship, as the avails of investments of various kinds for sacred purposes. This, however, is a matter of mere personal and individual arrangement, which she may comply with, or disregard, at her discretion.

These are some of the excellencies of the

divine method. In its execution, regard is had to all, of every character, who compose the great mass of believers. Too frequently churches are supported wholly by a few persons, and the multitude do almost nothing. Such a condition of things, as it is always exceedingly pernicious, should be most sedulously avoided. Either the few contribute more than they ought, or the amount raised is insufficient; and, in both cases, all are sufferers. Those who fail, or refuse to act, are injured, the church deliberately permits them to sin; they necessarily feel little interest in a cause, for the advancement of which they make no exertions; their conscientiousness becomes blunted; and they soon are found to occupy a very low position in the scale of religion. This, doubtless, is one reason why there are, in our country, so many churches, and Christians, who "have a name that they live, and are dead."

The execution of the law of Christ, it will be seen, on consideration, is entirely practicable. There is but one person upon whom it depends, and that is the man himself who is the contributor. He acts under the all-seeing eye, and graduates his proceedings by his own sense of obligation to the author of all his blessings. Inability never can be pleaded, be-

cause it is impossible that it should exist, since we contribute only *"as God has prospered us,"* and at a time when the avails are yet in our own hands. Who cannot do thus much? The whole plan proceeds upon a sort of *ad valorem* principle, the stock of which is the blessing of our heavenly Father. The arrangement is fully practicable.

As I have already observed, in the practise of this principle, every man consults his own temporal as well as spiritual advancement. It gives regularity and promptness to his habits of action. If he possess these in spiritual things, they will inevitably communicate themselves to his temporal engagements, and always greatly to their advantage. It will compel him weekly to calculate his profits and losses in business. Otherwise he cannot determine what duty requires him to consecrate as an offering to God. Thus he will, necessarily, be kept fully informed, and may avoid falling into numerous snares and dangers, by which we are perpetually surrounded. Above all, it will accustom him to conduct his affairs with constant reference to his duty to God, and thus defend him against an inordinate attachment to the things of this life.

Such is the law of God, its excellencies and its characteristics, for creating and sustaining

the requisite revenues in his church. As to the amount and all other circumstances, except that it is to be larger or smaller, as God's blessing shall indicate, it is left to the voluntary decision of the individual concerned. But he who is able and will do nothing, manifests an indifference, and a spirit of disobedience to Christ, inconsistent with religion. What a man contributes for the cause of Christ, is proof of what he feels. He feels no more than he does; and he that does nothing feels nothing, and should be permitted to profess nothing. Thus in the support of the gospel, our love to God is thoroughly tested on the principle that a "tree is known by its fruit."

As, however, the best system for revenue, or for any other purpose, in civil government, must, without the superintendence of appropriate officers, entirely fail of its end, so it is in the church of Christ. No plan will execute itself. Christians should be taught the laws of Christ on this subject; for I must believe they are willing to comply with them when understood. Why, then, are these laws so seldom obeyed? I answer, the ministry have not given the people the instruction, definitely and fully, they needed on this subject; and the evil has been aggravated by the fact, that no one has superintended their execution. Com-

pliance, therefore, has been, in effect, not advocated and enforced, but entirely discouraged. If the deacons are the financial officers of the church, and superintend the whole department committed to them; and if the laws will not execute themselves; they, of course are their executors, divinely appointed for this purpose. They are as much obliged to see the laws carried into effect in their department, as the pastor is in his, or as the church is in hers. When a member habitually violates gospel morals, it is the duty of every one associated with him as Christians, to bring him to the proper discipline; it is the duty of the pastor to provide that the gospel be fully preached, and all the ordinances of religion duly administered; if so, it is no less the duty of the deacons to see that every member contributes to the sacred revenue, according to his ability, and to bring the amount into the treasury. It may not, always, be necessary or even desirable, for all to bestow money. Some may have other things fully as profitable; food and raiment, or any other required articles. Let these be contributed. To many of our country brethren, such an arrangement may be exceedingly convenient. But an entire and persevering refusal to comply with the divine injunction on this subject, should never

be permitted to pass without the proper action of the church.

Who, that considers the whole subject now before you maturely, can doubt, that carried fully into effect the arrangement would prove entirely sufficient for all the purposes designed? God intended it to be sufficient, and if it fails it is not his fault, but because we are unfaithful to our trust.

Let us here recapitulate, as to the duties of deacons. We have, in this and the two preceding chapters, seen that these all arise from their office as depositaries of the common property and funds of the church, of which they have, *ex officio*, the possession and superintendence, and consist in *these* FOUR *particulars* —that they pay the ordinary and incidental expenses of divine worship; that they take care of the poor and distressed; that they see that the pastor is comfortably supported; and that they superintend the prosecution of the Scriptural plans for the raising of such revenues as may be necessary for the regular and permanent service of our holy religion. Such is the sum of all the divinely enjoined duties of the deacons.

I close the discussion of this part of our subject by suggesting that, as the deacons, in their own peculiar department are, as we have

said, a BOARD OF OFFICERS, or the *executive board* of the church, for her temporal department, it is necessary that they hold stated and frequent meetings of their own body in that capacity, prepare to prosecute their duties in concert, and with the best advice. Who can doubt that the first deacons held daily meetings? The peculiar nature of their relations to the disciples required it. In our circumstances their sessions should not be less frequent, especially in the towns, than once in a month. They appear to me to be imperative, on many accounts. Unity, and cooperation in action, are of the utmost importance. But without stated and frequent meetings they can never be gained or preserved. They will compel thought; lead to a better knowledge of their duties; to a higher appreciation of their importance; and to more promptness and fidelity in their execution.

# 7

## Deaconesses

FEMALE assistants to the deacons, usually called DEACONESSES, existed in the primitive churches. They were ladies of approved character and piety; and their duty required them to minister to females, under circumstances in which it would have been manifestly improper that the other sex should have been employed. Their services were regarded as of very great importance, if not entirely indispensable. Ecclesiastical historians, the early Fathers, and other writers, refer to them frequently and familiarly.

Mosheim, for example, in his *History of the First Century*, introduces them thus: "The Eastern churches elected *deaconesses*, and chose for that purpose, matrons, or widows, of eminent sanctity, who also ministered to the necessities of the poor, and performed several other offices, that tended to order and decency in that church."[1] All the other writers of his class, of distinction, have stated the same thing in similar terms.

Clemens of Alexandria,[2] who wrote in the

[1] Vol. I, pp. 90-91
[2] *Stromat.*, Lib. 3, p. 443

*second* century, treats extensively of deaconesses, advocates their legitimacy, and appeals, as authority, to Paul's first epistle to Timothy. Jerome, who flourished in the *fourth* century, speaks of them,[3] as generally found in the churches. The book of "Apostolic Constitutions" prescribes their election, and publishes forms for their ordination.[4] We may indeed appeal, on this topic, even to the enemies of the Christians. Pliny, the distinguished Roman Governor of Bithynia, in his well-known letter to the Emperor Trajan,[5] regarding their affairs, describes two females whom he ordered to be put to the torture, and says of them, *quaæ ministræ dicebantur*, "who were called *ministresses*, or female deacons." Such is the testimony of profane history.

There can be, therefore, no doubt as to the matter of fact. It is conceded, on all hands, that deaconesses were employed, and that constant resort was had to their ministry in the first churches of Christ. The only question to be decided is whether the word of God authorizes, or in any manner enjoins their appointment. This infallible authority is our unerring guide. When we have ascertained its teachings, we comply without further inquiry.

[3] Comm. in 1 Tim. 3:11
[4] Lib. 8, ch. 19, 20
[5] A.D. 106

Let us, then, "to the law and to the testimony." "What saith the Scriptures?"

In his address to the church in Rome, Paul thus appeals to his brethren of that city: "I commend unto you Phœbe, our sister, which is a [*Διάκονον*, a *Deaconess*, in our version] *servant* of the church in Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints; and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a *succorer of many*, and of me also."[6] Phœbe is, therefore, by an apostle, called expressly a *Deaconess* of the church; and we are assured that she had honorably and effectually exercised that office, in the *succors* she had extended to many, and, either directly or indirectly, to the apostle himself among the number. Two facts are implied in this passage, both of which are worthy of our attention. The first is, that the apostle speaks of this excellent lady *in her official character*, in terms of high approbation, and commends her, not only as a sister, but as a *Deaconess*, to his brethren in Rome. This he never could have done, if *he* had not regarded the office as legitimate. And the second is, the strong probability, that, as the church at Cenchrea had deaconesses, they were also found in all the other

[6] Rom. 16 : 1-2

churches. Uniformity, no doubt, prevailed in their organization. This passage, therefore, must be regarded as conclusive of the Scripture warrant for deaconesses.

But this is not all. *Three* other passages are supposed to allude to the deaconesses. To these I will refer, however, only as collateral testimony in the premises.

Speaking of a class of persons called "*Χήρας*," (Cheras), the apostle says: "Let not a *widow* be taken *into the number* under threescore years old; having been the wife of one man; well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children; if she have lodged strangers; if she have washed the saints' feet [ministered the usual rites of hospitality]; if she have relieved the afflicted; if she have diligently followed every good work."[7] The nature, or the privilege of this *class*, into which only widows, of the character described, were to "be taken," I shall not now attempt to determine. It is very certain, however, that they were not, as has been so generally supposed, to be "taken into the number" of those who were *supported by the church*. "It can hardly be imagined that a widow, unless she had considerable property, could have done the things enumerated, some of which would occa-

[7] 1 Tim. 5:9-10

sion no small expense."[8] She could not, therefore, have been very poor. Would it not, also, have been a strange prohibition, if the benevolence of the church had been denied to a woman, however helpless and afflicted, unless she was *sixty years old?* How singular, too, the condition that she must have had *children,* to entitle her to this bounty! If a woman have children, she is thought on that account to be less dependent. Indeed, in a previous injunction, in immediate connection with this passage, the apostle says: "If any widow have children, or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God."[9] In other words, such widows are to be supported by their children, or nephews, and not by the church. Who, then, were these "*Χήρας?*" (*Cheras.*) The qualifications required of them singularly resemble those of a deacon. Their age, however, was too great to suppose that they were capable of much active service. Many of our best Biblical expositors presume that they were those who had been deaconesses, and now, in the evening of their days, enjoyed some kind of peculiar immunities.

[8] Clark's Com. in loc.
[9] 1 Tim. 5:4

A second passage speaks of them, as is believed, under the general name of "WOMEN." Addressing some unnamed brother and friend at Philippi, Paul says: "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow [colleague] help *those women* who labored with me in the gospel."[10] How did they labor with him in the gospel? It cannot be that they *preached,* since the same apostle says, in another place, "I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority" in the church. Yet they labored with Paul, and were so distinct from all others, that they were known by the simple description, *"those women."* Why should we withhold our assent from the almost unanimous opinion of commentators, that they were the deaconesses of the church?

To the last passage I had occasion before to refer, when treating of the qualifications of deacons, and then promised that I would, in a future chapter, consider it more at large. In our common version it has the following reading: "Even so must their [the deacons'] wives be grave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things."[11] We have already seen, I trust, satisfactorily, that no reference is here had to the wives of deacons. But does not the apostle say,

[10] Phil. 4 : 3
[11] 1 Tim. 3 : 11

"Even so must *their wives* be grave?" In our translation he does; but when you turn to the original, you find no such thing! The reading is γυναίκας ὡσαύτως σεμνάς, literally, "Let the *women* also be grave." This strikingly resembles the last passage noticed, "Help those *women.*" The wives of the deacons, as we have before seen, are spoken of in the next verse, and not in this. These *"women,"* then, were some other *"women,"* and not the deacons' wives. What women were they? Clemens, Jerome, and other ancient writers, say they were the *Deaconesses,* and so say our best writers of modern times. The conclusion is most natural. No one supposes they were the deacons' wives. Paul, in other places, speaks of them. He was here describing the qualifications of deacons, and what is more consonant than to suppose, that, in passing, he adds a few words regarding the qualifications of deaconesses. As the *Deacons,* so the *Deaconesses* must be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. They must be aware of their calling. Such, I confess, appears to me to be the true sense of the apostle.

Take all these passages together, and I think it will be difficult for us to resist the conclusion that the word of God authorizes, and in some sense, certainly by implication, enjoins

the appointment of deaconesses in the churches of Christ.

Were they, in ancient times, and are they now, "requisite and necessary"? This is our next inquiry, and we address ourselves, without formality, to its consideration.

We cannot but reply in the affirmative, if we consider what has been, in all ages, and what is now, the condition of females in the East. They are generally, as is well known, much more secluded than they are with us. Access can properly be had to them, and they can, therefore, in many respects, be benefited only by persons of their own sex. These should, without doubt, be women of approved character and ability, and ought to go forth to their work with the sanction of the church. In Oriental countries, therefore, deaconesses were, and are, beyond question, indispensable.

And are they altogether useless among us? Do we not know that they might have admission to multitudes of their own sex with very great advantage to the interests of religion, under circumstances in which, otherwise, they must remain unvisited? Gentlemen cannot administer to their wants. And further, when ladies are to be baptized, they may be left, and frequently are, in the most painful manner, unattended, unless there are some persons

specially designated for that duty; or they may be accompanied by those of very unsuitable character. Deaconesses, therefore, are everywhere, as necessary as they were in the days of the apostles.

Let us next consider their qualifications, as we find them set forth in the word of God.

If deaconesses are to be employed, it is very evident that they should be women whose reputation for piety, and whose kind, intelligent, and courteous deportment, will give force to their ministrations, and all whose conversation and intercourse will beneficially impress those for whom they labor. We are accordingly admonished that they must "be grave, not slanderers [*μὴ διαβόλους*, literally, not devils] sober, faithful in all things"—women who "have followed every good work." Those of this character, and not the vain, the giddy, and the thoughtless, should do the office of deaconesses. The reasons are plain. They are to visit the sick, the miserable, and the helpless, and ought to feel for them an abiding sympathy, and be ready and able, at all times, to hold forth to them the consolations of the gospel of Christ. They are, as we have said, to attend their neophyte sister at baptism, and to be the companions of her toilet, before and after the sacrament. This solemn and striking act of Chris-

tian devotion is to be performed but once in our life! How important, then, that, during its administration, we should feel the full spirit of the gospel! But how easily, on such occasions, by the frivolous conversation of thoughtless girls, to whom this duty may be left, are the minds of the recipients diverted from the proper thoughts, and is all the holy sweetness of that hour destroyed! These, and the numerous other interesting and important duties they are called upon to fulfil, make it necessary that they maintain the prescribed character: "Let the *women* also be grave, sober, faithful in all things."

When we look around us we see, indeed, in effect, deaconesses in nearly all our well-regulated churches. In most of the other denominations, the office is rendered unnecessary, partly by their having abolished baptism, partly by their aristocratic propensities, on account of which, as we have seen in another place, they themselves confess that they have almost "no poor among them"; and partly by their having instituted, in opposition to the gospel, female orders, as with the Roman Catholics, who have their troops of *"Sisters of Charity,"* and other sisters rather too *charitable;* but in the true church, in which are maintained primitive principles, all the orig-

inal institutions of religion are indispensable. There are ladies, self-appointed, I admit, but whose intelligence and piety have led them to see that such offices ought to be performed, and, governed by a just sense of propriety, who voluntarily undertake to discharge them. Thus they become substantially deaconesses, and in some degree make amends for the want of proper ecclesiastical action. Our churches thus far, consequently, have the benefit of the deaconesses.

We have now seen, with as much brevity as the nature of the case would admit, that female assistants to deacons, or deaconesses, existed in the primitive churches; we have considered the passages in the word of God, in which they are named and described; we have proved their necessity at the present day, as well as in former times, where the duties and ordinances of religion are administered in their original and lawful forms; we have examined their qualifications, and shown that they are still found, substantially, in all our best-regulated churches. We close this topic by remarking that from all that appears in the Scriptures, we are justified in the conclusion that deaconesses were not, as deacons are, formally ordained, "the book of Apostolic Constitutions," as it is improperly called, to the

contrary notwithstanding. Apostolic example authorizes and enjoins their appointment. But in their selection, (I judge from the silence of inspiration) no further proceedings were had than the action of the church by which they were designated, and their own promise to perform, "to the best of their knowledge and ability," the duties enjoined. All that seems yet to be wanting among us, is the selection and approval by the churches, of the persons to be employed; and, generally, more regular and systematic attention to this department, so as to secure the performance of its duties well, promptly, and faithfully.

# 8

## Cooperation with the Deacons

EVERY church of Christ, regularly organized according to the Scriptures, is made up of *three departments.* The first is constituted of the body of the people, who compose the communicants; the second, of the deacons; and the third is filled by the pastor. These all form one church, whose unity is essential to its strength and success. Each department must have the concurrence and cooperation of the others, in both *spiritual* and *temporal* things. The church is the depository of the Divine word and ordinances; and has in charge the purity of truth, and the conversion of the world. But without a pastorship and other ministry, she could achieve nothing. The whole body would present the aspect of an unwieldy mass, without a voice to speak, or hands to execute her purposes. Therefore, "God hath set some *in the church,* first apostles, secondarily prophets, [and] thirdly teachers."[1] These are her agents for the diffusion of light—the universal propagation of the gospel. They must, therefore, cooperate with her faithfully and zealously in the great work.

[1] 1 Cor. 12:28

The ministry, on the other hand, can do little without the church to sustain them and to second their efforts. The cooperation of the church removed, and they would have no human arm on which to lean; no warm hearts to sympathize in their toils, perplexities, and objects; no companions in prayer, to invigorate their faith and to cheer them on to duty. Under God they must look to the church, and there they find "a munition of rock," a source of resistless energy. While the ministers are thus upheld, temporally and spiritually, and are able to point the world to her light, as concurrent evidence of the power of the gospel, "no weapon that is formed against her shall prosper," victory shall crown them in every field of their conflicts.

All this, however, is dependent, in no small degree, upon the powerful auxiliary aid of the Deaconship. The church would be fully as efficient with a good Deaconship, and without a ministry as she would be with a good ministry and without a Deaconship. The result, in either case, would be feebleness and disaster. Remove the deacons, or, what amounts to the same thing, let them be incompetent or inefficient, and the church is like an army without officers, unprovisioned and undisciplined, in the country of its enemy. No chan-

nel, regularly arranged, for supplies or direction exists, and all their efforts are paralyzed. Every divinely appointed department is necessary to every other. A competent and faithful Deaconship must have the cooperation of the church and of the ministry, in order to the advancement of the cause of Christ.

If, in their ordination, the deacons enter into vows before God, to do by his help the work assigned them, the churches, in their election and presentation, and the ministry, in their ordination, solemnly pledge themselves to stand by them in their office.

The church then, in the first place, who elects the deacons, and presents them for appointment, in that act solemnly pledges to them her cooperation in the great work to which they are called. What this is I have already shown, in what has been said on the duties of the deacons. Is it possible that she can ever, voluntarily, fail to redeem that obligation? Can we forget or violate responsibilities so sacred, into which we have entered with all the sanctions of religion? Alas! I fear that it is but too common. How criminal in the sight of God is such an abandonment! How unjust! How destructive to the church! If every brother shall be ready when called upon, or even without being called upon, to do what-

ever his ability or the cause of Christ may demand, the labors of the deacons will be sufficiently arduous, and no Christian will have gone beyond his own voluntary promise. But if any considerable number neglect or refuse, what can they do? They may toil on for a season, but sooner or later they must sink! The cause cannot be maintained unless every one will do his duty. When it is decided that the cooperation of the church cannot be obtained, what is the remedy? I can think of none but to abandon her, as we would an unmanageable ship at sea. Her members habitually disregard the authority of Christ, and violate their own solemn vows. They have no right to be respected as a church of the Redeemer. To perpetuate such a body, under that sacred title, is to preserve and cherish a reproach—a leprosy upon the name and honor of religion. It does not frequently happen, however, that all the church neglect, or refuse, to cooperate with the deacons, but that individual members do so, and sometimes in numbers so large as almost to overwhelm all her energies. In such cases, what is the remedy? I answer that the delinquents, if they cannot be reclaimed, should be required to answer at her bar. Members of the body politic, who constantly violate or perseveringly neglect to

observe, the laws of their country, are sure to be called to account. If they are not, the government is pronounced utterly depraved and worthless. Shall the church be less just than civil government? No society can safely tolerate in its bosom those who will not conform to its laws. How much less should a church continue in its fellowship persons who habitually, openly, and perseveringly disregard the laws of the Redeemer? Can she do it and preserve her purity, or gain the end for which she was organized?

But more commonly, no *refusal* to cooperate with the deacons takes place. Indeed, all *professedly* desire to see the work done, and the cause prosper. No one, however, is ready, or prepared to do anything himself. Slothfulness rests upon them with the crushing weight of a mountain. They will act, as soon as they can; but they never can; they never do! Through this process the same result is reached. They do nothing, not for want of ability, but, really, because they will do nothing! Their reluctance to duty, like that of a sinner to religion, can never be overcome. Thus they sin against God, and destroy themselves.

How long will the church submit to such degradation, and soil her beautiful garments in the dust! Let her arise to a sense of her

own dignity and glory. Let every one of her members be well and thoroughly instructed as to what is required at his hands, and what the deacons have a right to expect and demand. Then, if the love of God dwell richly in their hearts, their cooperation with them will not be difficult. They will rejoice that they are permitted to be associated, actively, with those who "are workers together with Christ," in the salvation of men.

But the ministry, also, in the second place, in the ordination of the deacons, are solemnly pledged to cooperate with them, in all the legitimate services of their sacred calling.

This promise is, mainly, redeemed by teaching those who are under their charge their whole duty, upon every part of the subject in hand. They are the divinely appointed instructors, both of deacons and people. All must have light; and if the pastors, and other ministers, do not give it, faithfully and fully, they stand condemned, before both God and his church. If ignorance of duty on the part of the church, however well inclined she may be, necessarily produces a failure to cooperate with the deacons, because she knows not how to act, how much more injurious must be the absence of adequate knowledge on the part of the deacons themselves! If they know not

their duty, how can they be expected to perform it? Are we not obliged to confess that great want of information has prevailed, and, in many places, yet prevails, among them? How often are those found who imagine, when they have prepared the sacred emblems, and waited upon the communicants, at the Lord's Supper, that most of their work is done! Besides this, they presume, if anything happens to be in their hands for that purpose, that they ought to relieve the necessities of the suffering, and to have, too, some care for their pastor. But their ideas on the whole subject are, more or less, confused; and how, and to what extent, they are to act, they have very little conception. Who, I now ask, is principally responsible for this ignorance, and consequent inefficiency? The ministry, undoubtedly! It is their duty to teach the whole body. They have not done so, and therefore have failed to cooperate, as they are pledged to do, in this great work.

Ministers generally, it must be conceded, manifest great disinclination to give to their people much instruction in that peculiar department which belongs to the deacons.

They are entitled, I suppose, to some apology, because the subject seems to involve their own personal interest, and, since they are

liable to be charged with selfishness as their motive, and the world, and covetous professors of religion, apply so readily the stereotyped imputation, "money hunters," they are afraid. But the result is, that they are driven, by the fear of their enemies, into unfaithfulness to God, to their brethren, and to the cause of Christ! It is, I confess it, *possible* that, if they preach the whole truth on this, as well as every other subject, the reputation and influence of some of them, in various quarters, may, for a season, be injured. But, brethren, the work must be done, come what will. Let us, then, approach it in the spirit of Paul, and "count not even our lives dear unto ourselves, so that we might finish our course with joy, and the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Fidelity, on the part both of the church and of the ministry, is of the utmost importance. Without it, all must, by this time, confess that the church cannot be sustained, and the truth propagated with vigor and effect. With it, we have the blessing of God, a good conscience, and the fulfilment of our highest desires.

And the motives to cooperation with the deacons—how infinitely strong are they!

We all profess to regard the souls of men

as of countless value. Can they be saved without the gospel? Can that be extended—can it even continue to be preached where it now is—unless we have the mutual and warm concurrence of all the departments in the church? Truth is more precious than gold; but it cannot otherwise be propagated and defended. How are the claims upon us of the poor, the distressed, and the wretched, to be met? How are the ordinances of the house of God to be administered? The church, and the ministry, therefore, are obliged to cooperate with the deacons, by their duty of obedience to Christ; by their own solemn pledge, given at their election and ordination; by their love to the souls of men; by their reverence for the truth of God; by their obligations to the poor, the suffering and distressed; and by their estimate of the ordinances and privileges of the gospel of Christ.

# 9

## Importance of Faithfulness

FAITHFULNESS is a duty enjoined on all Christians. It is made the condition—while its opposite is denounced as most repugnant to God—of the highest rewards. "Be thou faithful unto death," said the adorable Redeemer to his laboring and persecuted disciples, "and I will give you a crown of life." The importance of possessing this quality is necessarily increased in any particular case, in proportion as persons are elevated in office and influence in the church. The fidelity of the deacons, therefore, is next in consequence to that of the pastor himself, since such is their relative position in the kingdom of Messiah.

Unhappily, cases of unfaithfulness on the part of deacons are but too frequent, and too little regarded. This dereliction must arise either from incompetence, neglect, or design. To be faithful, deacons must know their duty, they must cheerfully and willingly do their duty, and they must do it at the proper time, and in the proper spirit, and manner. Look into the condition of the church whose deacons are not faithful to their trust, and what do you see? Every interest is languishing. Her

financial affairs become deranged and ruined; the poor and miserable weep unpitied and unrelieved; the sick are unvisited; the pastor, discouraged and overwhelmed, is either broken down in spirit, and inefficient, or leaves for a more promising field in which to bestow his toils; the congregations fall off, and cease to feel further interest; the genius of desolation broods, in darkness and silence, over the whole scene! Is this picture overdrawn! Would to God it were. On the contrary, its reality may, at this moment, be found in a thousand places all over our broad land. It reveals one of the most prolific causes why so many of our churches have ceased to exist; and why so many others have been divided, scattered, and led into destructive errors, of every grade and complexion. These are the natural results. The church so officered cannot retain a competent ministry. She, therefore, satisfies herself, either with none at all, or with the services of those who do more harm than good. Unqualified pastors often complete the ruin which such deacons, by making way for them, had only begun. They are, whatever their age may be, "*novices*," who cannot teach, who will not learn, who are liable to be corrupted by the first errorist who will flatter and persuade them, and too often, after having perverted

the church, they consign it over, as a trophy, into the possession of the enemy. Some such disaster, unless the peculiar favor of God interpose, always occurs. Never did a church, whose deacons were unfaithful to their trust, permanently flourish.

But is there, perhaps we shall now be asked, no remedy? Can such officers never, by any Scriptural process, be displaced and succeeded by others?

If a lay member is delinquent he is subjected to discipline, and either reformed or excluded. A pastor who is unfaithful is readily removed, and if he is heterodox or disorderly, he is deposed, probably excommunicated. But if a man is a deacon, no matter whether he is faithful or unfaithful, he remains in office during life, unless he please to change his residence, or is expelled from fellowship for immorality! Who ever heard of a deacon's being deposed, or even impeached, for want of fidelity in his office? I never did! Why is this? Has none of them ever materially erred? This cannot be supposed. Does it not go far to prove that there is something on this point exceedingly wrong, and singularly unguarded? The church, I answer, has the same remedy here that she has in all other cases. God has said to her, and she cannot

misunderstand the admonition: "Thy brother —thou shalt, in any wise, not suffer sin upon him."[1] If the failure arise from the want of knowledge, the deacons must be instructed. Does the minister neglect or decline to do this? Then the sin becomes his. Does the unfaithfulness of these officers result from slothful indifference? Then they must be admonished. If it is voluntary and continued, and neither instruction from the pastor nor admonition from the church can procure reformation, they must be impeached, and, by a regular vote, removed. The same power that makes an officer, is always competent, when he proves himself unworthy or unfaithful, to displace him. Nor is it a matter of indifference whether this is done. She dare not decide to take no notice of it, and let it pass. No church can, in justice to herself, to the interests of religion, or to her duty to the King in Zion, suffer such an incubus. She is obliged to remove them. If she does not, she becomes a partaker in their sins, and must expect from the hand of God summary chastisement. But we turn to more pleasant considerations.

The importance of fidelity on the part of the deacons, if they are in the proper exercise of religion, will be deeply impressed upon their

[1] Lev. 19 : 17

minds by the fact that the vows of God are upon them. When they accepted the office, and when the hands of ordination were imposed, they bound themselves in the most solemn and fearful manner, to Christ and to his people, that they would, Jehovah aiding them, fulfil its duties. A noble and generous heart will stand by that pledge, even for its own sake, to the last hour.

But, irrespective of all this, they cannot but remember that the great day is near when they must answer, before the judgment-seat of Christ, for their stewardship. If they fear God, they must seek earnestly to be faithful in all things.

Another consideration, not less affecting, is the consequences which are to be produced upon all the interests of religion. What these are, at least negatively, we have already seen. On the other hand, adversity and languishing will not long characterize a church whose deacons are faithful to the interests committed to their charge.

But, chiefly, they, as all others, must and will be impelled to duty by *the love of Christ.* This is the glorious impulse, always dwelling in every Christian heart, and always effectual.

When every man—ministers, deacons, and people—is in his place, and fully animated

with the spirit of his calling, what power can successfully resist them? "The voice of a king is heard in the camp," and the nations will bow to his supremacy. Then, and not till then, will the church be "Clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

Let us now, briefly, recapitulate the topics which have passed in review.

In our first chapter we considered the nature of the Deaconship; in the second, the qualifications requisite; and in the third, the forms of election and ordination to the office; in the fourth, fifth, and sixth, we examined the duties of deacons, and satisfactorily settled their number and character; in the seventh, we investigated the subject of female assistants to deacons, or deaconesses; in the eighth chapter, we have seen the obligations of the church and the ministry, to cooperate with the deacons; and in the ninth, the importance of their fidelity to all the interests of religion.

I have only to add, in conclusion, that the day, as I trust, is not distant, when all deacons will fully understand and faithfully discharge their high vocation. Well does it befit a lofty spirit, filled with the love of God, and burning with quenchless zeal for the salvation of men. Nor this only, but when every Chris-

tian, whatever his position or calling, shall awake and shake himself from the dust, and "the feeblest among them become as David before the Lord." Then, indeed, will the blessings of God descend upon his churches, as the refreshing showers of spring. Songs of rejoicing will cheer the vales, and hosannas of triumph echo from every hill and mountain. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

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